DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 609	CE 074 128
TITLE	GNVQs 1993-97. A National Survey Report. The Final Report of a Joint Project. The Evolution of GNVQs: Enrolment and Delivery Patterns and Their Policy Implications.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Development Agency, London (England).; London Univ. (England). Inst. of Education.; Nuffield Foundation, London (England).
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-85338-446-1
PUB DATE	97
NOTE	139p.; For a related document, see ED 378 412.
AVAILABLE FROM	Further Education Development Agency, Publications Dept., Mendip Centre, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG, England, United Kingdom (12 British pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Academic Persistence; Competence; Dropout Rate; *Educational Certificates; Educational Research; Employment Patterns; Followup Studies; Foreign Countries; Job Skills; Outcomes of Education; Postsecondary Education; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; Secondary Education; *Student Attrition; *Student Certification; Student Educational Objectives; Vocational Education; Withdrawal (Education)
IDENTIFIERS	*General National Vocational Qualif (England)

ABSTRACT

A 1993-97 study researched the evolution of Intermediate and Advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in Britain. Data were collected from a nationally representative sample of 225 centers; 5,100 GNVQ students were surveyed individually. Findings indicated that, of the 5 original and 10 added GNVQ subjects, GNVQ programs were dominated by 4 of the original 5: Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, and Leisure & Tourism. GNVQs had become a major vehicle for direct competition between schools and colleges. Group sizes varied enormously among GNVQ centers. Students' rate of progress was extremely variable and associated with the institution they attended. GNVQ students at both Intermediate and Advanced level were overwhelmingly young and full time. GNVQ students evinced virtually no interest in combining their studies with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The dominant aspiration of Intermediate and Advanced GNVQ students was for further study. Completion rates for Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs were low. Over three-quarters of Intermediate GNVQ completers proceeded to further study. The majority of previous Intermediate and Advanced students were working in areas unrelated to their GNVQ subject. Overall, GNVQs had achieved some aims: they provided vocational programs and were an accepted route into higher education. They had not achieved the objective of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level and were not clearly related to occupationally specific NVQs. (Appendixes include a 35-item bibliography and data charts.) (YLB)

ED 407 609

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

THE NUFFIELD FOUNDATION

GNVQs 1993-97

a national survey report

the final report of a joint project

The evolution of GNVQs: enrolment and delivery patterns and their policy implications

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Registered charity number: 1044045

ISBN: 1 85338 446 1

Printed by Taylor Brothers Bristol Limited

Cover design by Mandie Johnson

Template design by Clare Truscott

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Foreword

We are pleased to publish the third and final report of the joint Nuffield Foundation/Further Education Development Agency/Institute of Education project: The Evolution of GNVQs which has been directed by Professor Alison Wolf at the Institute of Education. Like the two previous reports, this report will help senior managers in schools and colleges reach decisions on the shape and direction of the GNVQ curriculum and will contribute to the national development of GNVQs.

We hope that the findings of this report will be significant in contributing to the revised GNVQ model and would like to take this opportunity of congratulating Alison and her team on the rigour and professionalism of their study.

Ursula Howard
Director, Research and Information
FEDA, Further Education Development Agency

Helen Quigley
Assistant Director, Education
Nuffield Foundation

Preface and acknowledgements

This report appears only because, over the years, hundreds of GNVQ centres and thousands of GNVQ students have given up their time to answer our questions and provide us with the information we required. In some cases, this involved very substantial amounts of time, whether for interviews or in identifying and collating relevant data on student characteristics. Our respondents collaborated for no other reason than to help provide an objective, in-depth picture of how GNVQs were developing. We cannot name them; but we would like to emphasise how enormously grateful we are, and hope that they will find the end result worthwhile.

Other collaborators can be named. We would like to thank Aidan Pettitt, formerly Lead Development Officer for GNVQs at FEDA (previously FEU), who originally formulated the idea of a long-term university-based study of GNVQs; Geoff Stanton and Anthony Tomei, our original supporters and funders at the FEU and Nuffield Foundation; and Ursula Howard (FEDA) and Helen Quigley (Nuffield) who have contributed greatly to the conceptualisation and direction of a project they inherited. Still with our funders, we would like to express our gratitude to Caroline Mager, Pauline Sparkes and Ros White, especially for their help in ensuring that we received valuable policy-related input at various stages of the research.

A large number of people in different government agencies, research institutions, awarding bodies etc. have provided us with data, comments, or related research findings over the years. We would like to thank them all, without naming every one; but would also like to express our particular thanks to Patrick Wilkes of NCVQ for providing us with invaluable information at many points (and usually at extremely short notice); and to Paul Sokoloff of Edexcel and the GATE project at UCAS for providing us with recent unpublished data for use in this report. The comments of participants in the policy seminars which preceded publication of this report and the two interim reports were extremely valuable, as were the data and information which a number of participants provided afterwards.

Alex Scharaschkin carried out much of the earlier data analysis, including the bulk of the material included in the interim reports. Huw Jones and Joseph Ghosh joined the research team during the last year of the study, and made substantial contributions to the final report. Joyce Shaw and Jill Arrand have provided regular and highly valued inputs over the years, including data handling and site visits. The Project Administrator throughout has been Magdalen Meade, administrator of the International Centre for Research on Assessment (ICRA), Institute of Education; and she has also taken the major responsibility for the design and presentation of the results. Without her there would be no reports.

Professor Alison Wolf
Project Director
ICRA, Institute of Education, University of London

Executive summary

1. Over the period 1993-7, the Further Education Development Agency and the Nuffield Foundation funded a major study of the evolution of GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualifications). The study covered Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs and was carried out by the Institute of Education, University of London. Data were collected from a nationally representative sample of 225 centres registered to offer the award in 1993-4, the first year in which GNVQs were generally available. 5100 GNVQ students were also surveyed individually. This is the final report of the project.

2. The development of GNVQs was monitored against the objectives set for the award by the government in the 1991 White Paper Education and Training for the Twenty-First Century, and in later departmental guidance. The key objectives were that GNVQs and A levels should be the main basis for full-time study by 16-19 year olds; that GNVQs should enrol 25% of 16 year olds by 1996; that they should be offered in schools and colleges; and that they should (a) offer a broad preparation for employment; (b) be an accepted route to higher education; (c) be of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level; (d) be clearly related to occupationally specific NVQs.

3. Five GNVQ subjects were generally available in 1993-4. Although ten others have been added since, GNVQ programmes remain dominated by 4 of the original 5: Art & Design , Business, Health & Social Care, and Leisure & Tourism. Schools in particular are very unlikely to offer other subjects. Although most colleges offer a considerable number of other titles, enrolments are similarly dominated by the 'big 4' which recruit over three-quarters of GNVQ students. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that these titles *are* GNVQs.

4. Many schools have expanded their sixth form programmes using GNVQs. While most GNVQ students are in colleges, the study estimates that in 1995-6 a quarter of Advanced and almost half of Intermediate students were in schools. This constitutes a major change in the location of full-time vocational education courses. GNVQs have become, and are recognised as, a major vehicle for direct competition between schools and colleges.

5. Group sizes vary enormously among GNVQ centres. Some GNVQ groups are tiny and must involve some considerable cross-subsidy by other courses. Average group size is significantly lower in schools than in colleges. A majority of GNVQ courses are new ventures for the offering institution rather than replacements for previously existing courses. However, this is largely because so many centres are schools who are changing and expanding their post-compulsory programmes. In colleges, replacements are more common.

6. No major changes in GNVQ programme offerings are envisaged by centres. The general picture is of rapidly-achieved stability.

7. The way in which GNVQs are actually delivered is, by contrast, extremely variable. There are large differences in the number of teaching and contact hours reported both by GNVQ coordinators and team leaders, and by GNVQ students themselves. There is particular variability in patterns of core (key) skills delivery. These vary between centres, but are also subject to regular change at the within-centre level. Most GNVQ teams find core (key) skills delivery highly problematic.

8. Completion of a GNVQ requires steady progress during the course, since the award is unit-based, and each unit is assessed on portfolio work as well as an external test. Students' progress is, in fact, extremely variable. Students' rate of progress is associated with the institution they attend.

9. From the start of the study, teaching staff expressed serious doubts about whether GNVQs could provide a satisfactory replacement for existing specialised and full-time qualifications, notably at level 3 (i.e. GNVQ Advanced/A level/BTEC National Diploma level). Many of these older qualifications have, in fact, survived; and are continuing to recruit well. They are retained partly because of their specialist content and links to the workplace; and also because they enable colleges to offer a broad and flexible programme in the competition for students.

10. GNVQ students at both Intermediate and Advanced level are overwhelmingly young and full-time. They follow a one-year course if aiming at an Intermediate GNVQ, and a two year course for Advanced. Almost all of them enter their GNVQs programmes directly from other studies.

11. Other full-time vocational awards recruit from a similar population although their student bodies are somewhat older. However, part-time level 3 vocational awards have a largely adult student body. These awards are in decline, and GNVQs do not offer a replacement for them.

12. There has not been any overall growth in take-up of level 3 vocational awards since the introduction of GNVQs. Intermediate awards have in many cases displaced GCSE re-sit programmes. While such programmes were giving way to vocational awards before the advent of GNVQs, the availability of Intermediate awards appears to have hastened this process.

13. The likelihood of 16 year old students entering A level courses, Advanced GNVQ courses or Intermediate GNVQ courses can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy from their GCSE results. Advanced GNVQs recruit from the achievement band immediately below A levels, and Intermediate from one lower still. This pattern established itself at an early date and appears to be very stable. Advanced students have, on average, between 3 & 4 GCSEs at grade C or above; and Intermediate students an average of between 1 and 2 GCSEs at grade C or above.

14. Intermediate GNVQs provide a clear progression route whereby students with low GCSE grades complete an Intermediate GNVQ and then proceed to a higher level award. More than half of Advanced GNVQ students have 'deferred' their entry onto the course: i.e. have come via intermediate post-GCSE studies.

15. Many GNVQ students combine their course with other qualifications. By far the most popular combination is a GNVQ with GCSE re-takes in Mathematics and/or English. While programmes devoted entirely to GCSE retakes have declined rapidly in recent years, the popularity of Maths and English re-takes is great and increasing. Among Advanced students, around 15% take an A level as well. This group has higher GCSE grades than the average for Advanced students.

16. GNVQ students evince virtually no interest in combining their studies with NVQs or NVQ units. Both they and their teachers consider the GNVQ and NVQ student populations to be completely distinct; and only 3% of students report taking an NVQ. In general, NVQs play a small role in the education and training of 16-19 year olds. Proportions in work-based training (apprenticeship, YT) have declined sharply over the last decade as full-time participation rates have soared. However, the study precedes the general introduction of Modern Apprenticeship which may reverse this trend.

17. The dominant aspiration of Intermediate GNVQ students is for further study. Completion rates for Intermediate GNVQs are low at present: a national average of around 50%. However, among those who do complete, the study found that over three-quarters do indeed proceed to further study. Even among non-completers, a large proportion give further studies or training as their main occupation in the following year.

18. Among Advanced students, further study and training is also the dominant ambition. Almost two-thirds of first year students plan to continue to higher education or advanced training after their GNVQ. Whether they do so depends on whether they complete their GNVQ, and here too, completion rates are currently low (42% of registrations, 58% of the second-year student body). However, among those who do complete their award, many are successful in realising their plans. The number of GNVQ students applying to universities through UCAS for 1996 entry is equivalent to about three-quarters of those who completed the Advanced GNVQ; and of this group almost two-thirds received offers for degrees or for HNDs. Success in gaining entry to HE is associated with students' GNVQ grade and with whether they have also taken an A level.

19. Although GNVQ 'completers' have a high chance of entering higher education, non-completion rates mean that, overall, around a fifth of those registering for an Advanced GNVQ currently enter HE. We estimate that between 5% and 8% more enter other advanced training courses.

20. The jobs held by previous Intermediate and Advanced students who have entered the labour market reflect the general structure of employment for young people. The majority are working in areas unrelated to their GNVQ subject, notably retail and hospitality and catering. However, a minority of former GNVQ students do work in occupational areas which correspond to high-recruitment GNVQ courses (e.g. Business, Leisure & Tourism, Health & Social Care). Students who work in these areas are also very likely to have studied the same one. The results indicate that there is a definite link between GNVQ choice of subject and later work, although it operates for only a minority of students.

21. Intermediate students who progress to Advanced GNVQs are overwhelmingly likely to do so within the same subject area. Advanced students who enter higher education are also very likely to take a degree or HND in the same field. These areas of study represent a very small proportion of the country's occupational 'map' and technical and scientific occupations have very low representation.

22. Overall, GNVQs have achieved some of the aims set for them, and not others. They provide vocational programmes in schools as well as colleges, and are an accepted route into higher education; and they also provide a preparation for related employment for a sub-set of GNVQ students. However, the concentration of students in a few subject areas, and the tendency of such students to study only in that area (at Intermediate, Advanced and university level) is not obviously what was meant by a 'broad preparation for employment'.

GNVQs have not achieved the objective of 'equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level'; and nor are they 'clearly related to occupationally specific NVQs'. While GNVQs are the second largest set of qualifications taken by 16-19 year olds (after A levels) the persistence of other older qualifications means that they cannot really be described as the other main basis for full-time study in this age-group. This same persistence helps explain the fact that GNVQs currently enrol around 20% of 16 year olds rather than the target of 25% set for 1996.

Introduction

This document is the final report of a major research project supported by the Further Education Development Agency and The Nuffield Foundation. The project's purpose has been to examine how GNVQs (General National Vocational Qualifications) are evolving, and how far their development is in line with the objectives originally set out for them by the government. It covers the period 1993-1997, and provides extensive national and longitudinal data relating to **Intermediate** and **Advanced GNVQs**. Foundation GNVQs had not been introduced when the project began, and were therefore not included in the study design or in data collection. Students below the compulsory school leaving age were also not considered, for the same reason, although some are now studying for GNVQs. The population and institutions studied nonetheless cover the vast bulk of those involved in GNVQs, and the target population identified in the original government documentation and guidance.

As most readers will be aware, GNVQs were introduced into England, Wales and Northern Ireland at very high speed. The need for a 'range of general qualifications within the NVQ framework' was announced in May 1991 in the White Paper 'Education and Training for the 21st Century'. Over a period of months draft specifications for five different vocational areas[1] were produced, circulated widely for consultation, and finalised. In September 1992 students in a pilot group of schools and colleges began to study for the awards at levels 2 and 3 (later labelled Intermediate and Advanced). Over the period 1993-6, further awards were introduced in a range of other areas[2]. (See Appendix VI for the schedule of introductions.)

The rationale for the policy was set out by the White Paper, which noted that 'many young people want to keep their options open… (including) the possibility of moving on to higher education' and that 'Employers too want to have the opportunity of developing their young recruits' general skills, as well as their specific working skills.' The Department for Education (as it then was) stated during the awards' first pilot year that it was government policy for England, Wales & Northern Ireland that 'GCE A Level and GNVQ systems should provide the main basis for the programmes of study of students aged 16-19 in full-time education' and that 25% of 16 year olds should be starting on GNVQ courses by 1996 (DfE 16.4.93).

The new awards were a response to the emerging limitations of NVQs as a qualification for young people, especially those not in employment, and to the concurrent growth in post-16 staying-on rates. The NVQ framework was originally expected to encompass all vocational awards. For example, in 1991 the then-Minister of State responsible for NVQs stated in a DES Press Release that 'I expect (FE) colleges to weed out those courses which do not lead to an NVQ or its academic equivalent' (Statement by the Rt. Hon Tim Eggar, MP: 21.3.91).

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[1] Art & Design, Business, Health and Social Care, Leisure and Tourism, and Manufacturing

[2] Construction & the Built Environment, Engineering, Hospitality & Catering, IT, Land & Environment, Management, Media, Performing Arts & Entertainment, Retail & Distributive Services, Science

However, it was increasingly obvious that all was not well with the NVQ development process. NVQs were (and are) very occupationally specific awards, with little provision for general education, and a requirement for workplace experience and assessment which makes them very difficult for education establishments to offer. Young people were showing very little enthusiasm for them. Conversely there was a continuing and indeed growing demand for 'traditional' vocational and semi-vocational awards, especially those which, like the BTEC Diplomas, offered a strong general education component and the possibility of progress to further studies.

GCE A Levels, which were designed for a much smaller part of the age-group, were already, by 1991, taken by around a third of the 16-18 cohort - a figure which has continued to rise. At the same time, across the country, schools and colleges were experiencing rapid increases in educational enrolments post-16. In the 1980s it was common to castigate the country's low post-compulsory participation rates ; as it moved into the 1990s these low rates were becoming a thing of the past. These changes underlined the demand among young people for qualifications other than GCE A Levels and NVQs.

The government could, in theory, have left the existing, older awards to take up the student expansion. However, they were committed to developing a much clearer, more transparent framework of qualifications, arranged by level; and also to a generally interventionist stance in the area of vocational education (and indeed education generally). The title of the relevant White Paper, *Education and Training for the Twenty-first Century*, underlines these ambitions. The National Council for Vocational Education, originally established to accredit NVQs, was charged with developing another new sort of qualification, which in the first instance could be offered by, and only by, the three big vocational awarding bodies: BTEC, City & Guilds and RSA.

The new GNVQ awards had set for them a variety of quite specific and ambitious purposes. Thus, the White Paper specified that 'General NVQs should...

- offer a broad preparation for employment...
- (be) an accepted route to ...higher education...
- be of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level
- be clearly related to the occupationally specific NVQs...
- be suitable for use by full-time students in colleges, and if appropriate in schools...'

This study has collected extensive evidence on how far, over the intervening years, GNVQs have succeeded in meeting each and every one of these objectives. These findings are summarised in the following pages; and further details can be found in a series of interim publications.[3] The report also addresses how the developing GNVQ system fits into a post-compulsory education sector which has itself been evolving over the last five years. In the first interim report, we noted that, if all the White Paper's objectives were achieved, the introduction of GNVQs

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[3] Further Education Unit, Institute of Education and The Nuffield Foundation (1994) GNVQs 1993-4: A National Survey Report; and Further Education Unit, Institute of Education and The Nuffield Foundation (1995) GNVQs 1994-5: A National Survey Report. London: FEDA. Scharaschkin, A. (1996). Characteristics of 1994-5 Intermediate and First Year Advanced GNVQ Students. ICRA Research Monograph No. 12. London: Institute of Education. Wolf, A. (1997, forthcoming) Recruitment Patterns in a Competitive Sector: Post-Compulsory Qualifications in England and Wales. ICRA Research Monograph No. 13. London: ICRA, Institute of Education.

> would create a coherent tripartite structure with defined pathways between different tracks - something far closer to the systems common in continental Europe than anything that has previously existed in England. [4]

Since then, Sir Ron Dearing's review of qualifications for 16-19 year olds has formally proposed just such a tripartite structure of 'academic' A levels, 'applied' GNVQs and 'vocational' NVQs: one which would extend well beyond the young people who were his primary focus to the whole of the post-compulsory sector. In doing so, his report reiterates that GNVQs should fulfil a dual role. They must provide both 'a broad education in terms of applying knowledge and understanding to the world of work' and 'an underpinning to the strictly vocational NVQ' (Dearing 1996 para. 3.9).

The 1997 Education Act provides the new Qualifications and Curriculum Authority with unprecedented powers over all qualifications offered outside higher education. Given the government's general acceptance of Dearing's recommendations, one of its first concerns will be to clarify the nature of this far-reaching proposal. This study, by examining in depth how far GNVQs have fulfilled their objectives and developed into a clear applied pathway, thus reports at a most appropriate moment for educational policy-making.

The report falls into five sections. Part A describes the way in which GNVQ provision has developed in both schools and colleges. Part B relates this to the current nature of Dearing's 'applied' pathway, and the extent to which this has been or is likely to become subsumed within GNVQs. Part C is a profile of the students who take Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs. Part D explores these students' progression within and after their GNVQ courses, using longitudinal data from two cohorts of students. Part E explores the general implications of the findings, placing them within the context of the general nature and development of post-compulsory education in the 1990s.

[4] FEDA et al (1995) p.9

A: GNVQ Provision in Colleges and Schools 1993–96

A1 INTRODUCTION

1993-4 was the first year in which GNVQs were generally available in schools and colleges. In that year, the study team identified a representative sample of centres offering GNVQs. That sample has provided the basis for all the data collection that has taken place since, and allowed us to track changes at sector, institutional and individual student level. Part A describes developments in GNVQ provision by colleges and schools, and the implications for delivery of vocational education to young people.

The study's first stage involved sending a short questionnaire to all centres registered to offer GNVQs, checking subjects offered and willingness to participate. From the 804 returns a sample of 225 centres was drawn. This sample comprised 74 FE colleges, 26 sixth form colleges and 125 schools. It was drawn randomly within categories, and the final composition of the sample was very close to that recorded by NCVQ for 1993-4.

All these centres received questionnaires in the spring of 1994 and again in 1995 and 1996. The questionnaires collected data on enrolment figures, courses offered and predicted offerings and enrolments for the following year. In the first year, detailed questionnaires were also sent to subject team leaders for the five GNVQs then offered (Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, Leisure & Tourism, and Manufacturing); and in the second year the same was done for the new areas of Construction & the Built Environment, Hospitality & Catering, and Science. The results of these detailed subject questionnaires are reported in the first and second interim reports of the project.[5] Figure A.1 summarises the responses obtained from these three phases. In addition, site visits were made to a considerable number of colleges and schools over the period 1994-7. Information from these visits supplements the survey data.

Figures from NCVQ based on 1993-4 awarding body returns indicated the national breakdown of all 1,419 registered centres to be very similar to that of our sample. However, in the ensuing few years, the proportion of schools among centres (and the proportion of school-based students) has risen. In 1994-5, the 2,201 approved centres broke down into 1,168 schools, 382 FE colleges, 115 6th form colleges and 86 specialist institutions; in other words, 74% of registered GNVQ centres were schools compared to 57% only a year before. By 1995-6 the number of schools had risen again to 2,122, although their proportional representation had fallen back slightly to 71%. FE colleges, meantime, have increased slightly in absolute numbers (to 434); but now represent only 14% - about 1 in 7 - of centres registered to offer some GNVQ provision.

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[5] Further Education Unit, Institute of Education and The Nuffield Foundation (1994) GNVQs 1993-4: A National Survey Report; and Further Education Unit, Institute of Education and The Nuffield Foundation (1995) GNVQs 1994-5: A National Survey Report. London: FEDA

Figure A.1

1993-4	1994-5	1995-6
225 centres	225 centres	225 centres
156 returns	138 returns	152 returns
Phase 1	**Phase 2**	**Phase 3**

Centres responding at phases 1 + 2:	109
Centres responding at phases 2 + 3:	95
Centres responding at phases 1, 2 + 3:	79

While the whole FE sector was involved in GNVQs from 1993, this shift reflects the new and increasing involvement of schools in a range of post-compulsory qualifications. The focus on longer-standing GNVQ centres has enabled the study to track the evolution of provision *and* the progress over time of individual students. However, it also means that our sample has become less representative of the national population. To the extent possible, we have adjusted conclusions and weighted any estimates which are affected materially by the underrepresentation of schools.

A2 WHICH GNVQS DO CENTRES OFFER?

In 1993, when the study began, only five GNVQs were generally available: Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, Leisure & Tourism, and Manufacturing. The following year, Construction & the Built Environment, Hospitality & Catering and Science were available for general take-up; followed in 1995-6 by Engineering, Information Technology, Media, and Retail & Distribution. Figures A.2, A.3 and A.4 show the numbers of centres actually *offering* (as opposed to registering to offer) particular GNVQs.

In the case of both 1994-5 and 1995-6 weighted figures have been used, to adjust for the underrepresentation of schools in the sample. (See Appendix 1 for the weighting method used.) Two caveats are in order when examining the figures, however. The first is that there are major differences in the numbers of students at different centres. These differences apply between sectors as well as subjects; and this figure is therefore not a direct reflection of the relative number of *students* taking GNVQs. Actual enrolments are discussed in section A.3. Second, it is possible that the schools in our sample, all of which offered GNVQs from 1993-4, differ in their behaviour from later-registering schools: they may, for example, offer more subjects. If so, this will not be reflected in the data.

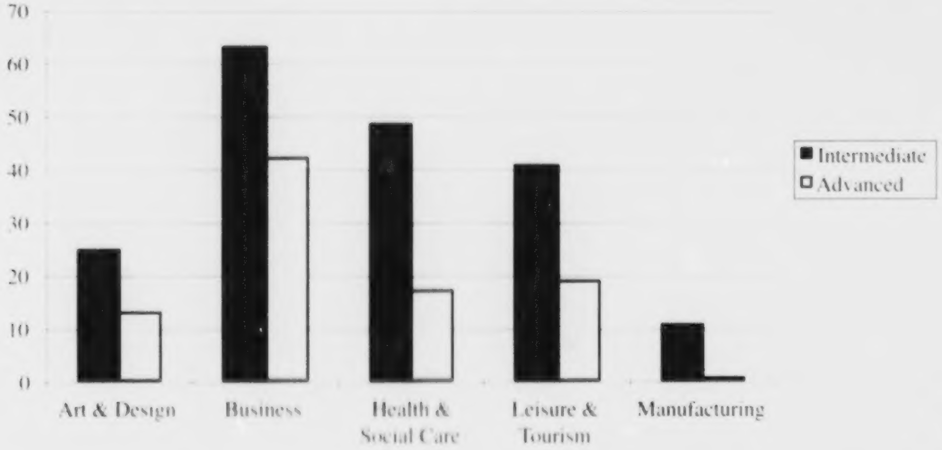

Figure A.2. Percentage of centres offering Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs by vocational area (study sample: n = 156): 1993-4

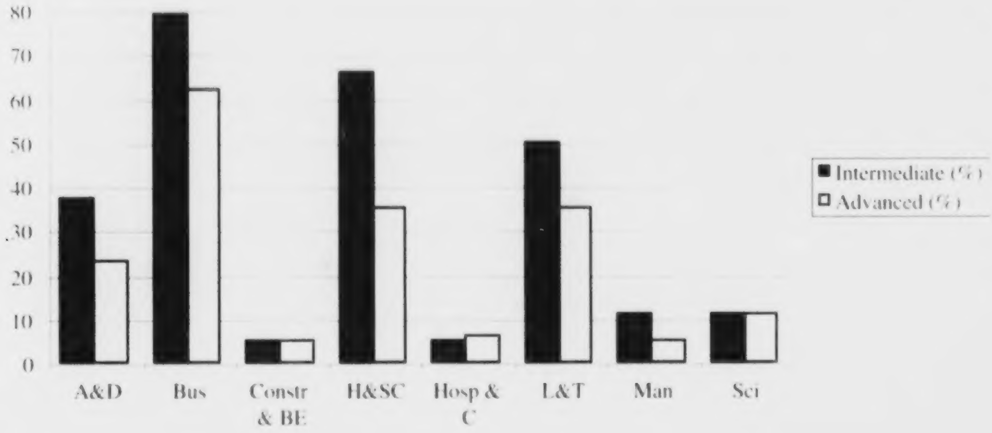

Figure A.3. Percentage of centres offering Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs by vocational area (weighted results): 1994-5

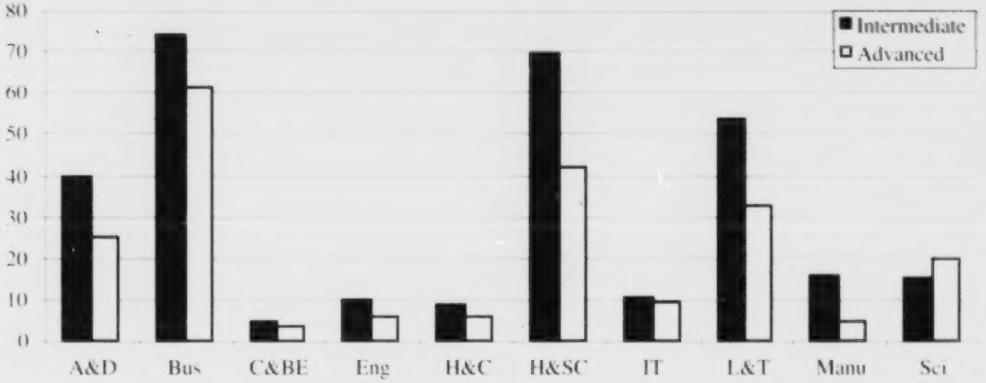

Figure A.4. Percentage of centres offering Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs (weighted results): 1995-6

What is most striking about these figures is the similarity between years. 1993-4 looks much like 1994-5; which in turn is much like 1995-6. In the first year of national provision (1993-4) four 'big' GNVQs dominated at the expense of the neglected Manufacturing option. Over the next two years, progressively more subjects were offered. Yet in 1995-6, what most centres were offering remained those same four GNVQs. In terms of what students are offered, GNVQs *consist*, to a remarkable degree, of Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, and Leisure & Tourism.

Underlying this pattern, however, are major differences between sectors. These are most striking when schools - which five years ago had very little involvement in vocational education - are compared with FE colleges. (Sixth form colleges generally fall between the two, though rather closer to FE colleges in their offerings (Scharaschkin 1995).)

Figures A.5 to A.8 illustrate this contrast. (The corresponding numbers are to be found in Appendix II.) Figure A.5 shows FE provision of the original five GNVQs as reported for 1993-4, and two years later. (Planned provision for 1996-7 showed only minute changes.) Figure A.6 shows the same for schools. In the case of FE, the picture outside manufacturing is of widespread availability: the majority - generally the large majority - of colleges offer all available options. In most schools, by contrast, most options are not offered.

Only Business (Intermediate and Advanced) and Intermediate Health & Social Care are available in the majority of school centres. Nothing else is generally available in schools, and while there has been in percentage terms a big increase in the range of Advanced courses run, they remain very much a minority offering. Moreover, responding centres were envisaging little change in the immediate future (see Appendix II).

Figures A.7 and A.8 break out FE college and school data for more recent GNVQs. (The small sixth form college group in our sample most resembles schools in this instance.) Here the contrast is dramatic. For schools, GNVQs

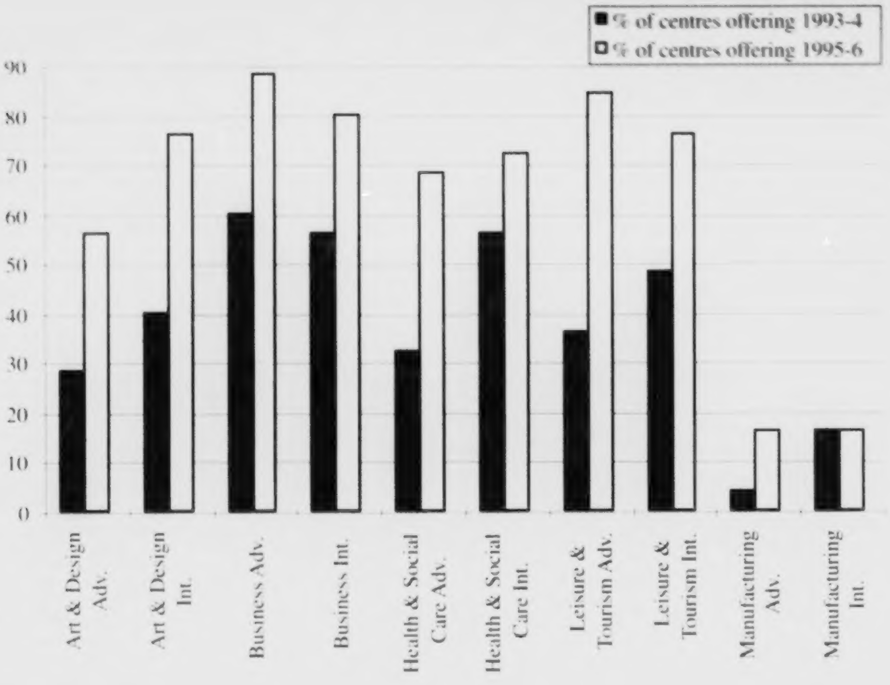

Figure A.5. Availability of 'older' GNVQs in the FE sector

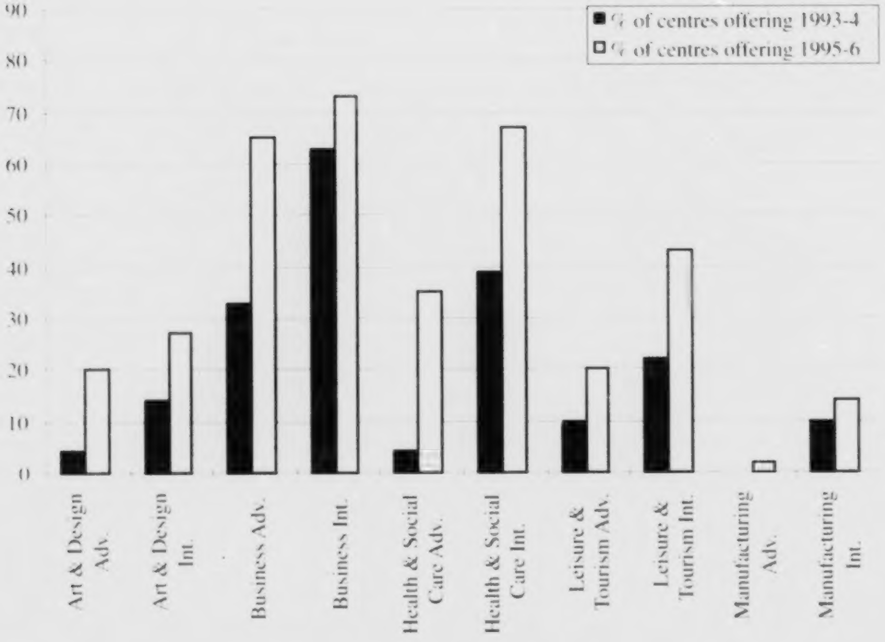

Figure A.6. Availability of 'older' GNVQs in the schools sector

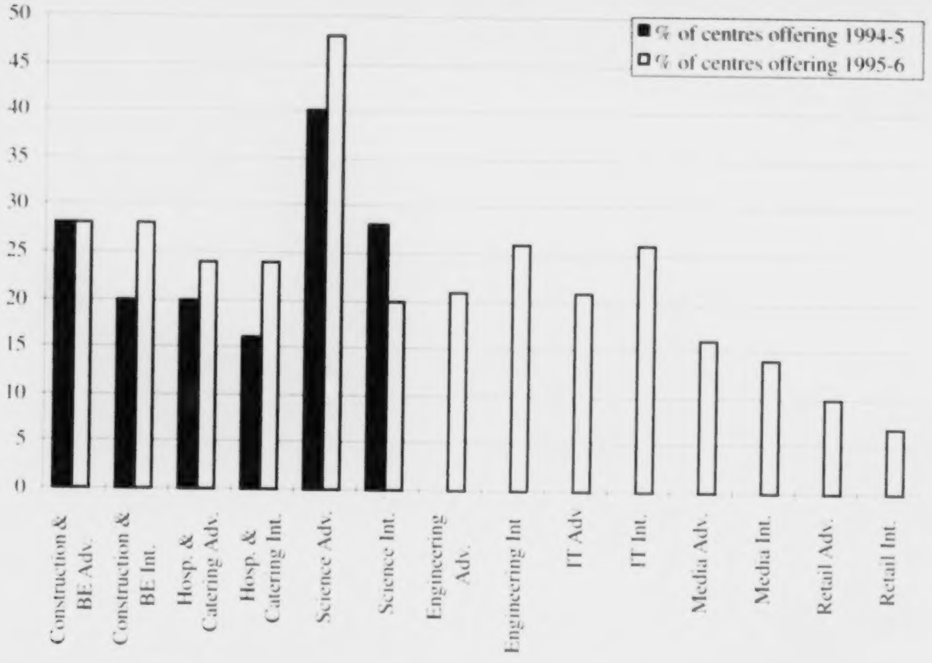

Figure A.7. Availability of 'newer' GNVQs in the FE sector

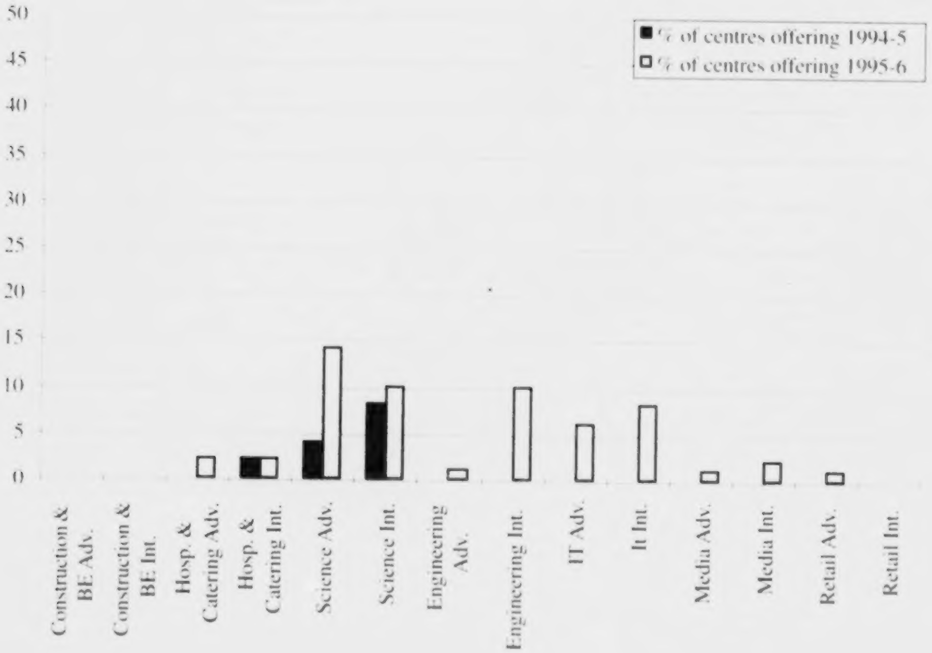

Figure A.8. Availability of 'newer' GNVQs in the schools sector

mean, essentially, the first few options offered. More recent options are, effectively, to be found only in the college sector.

Centres' replies to our surveys indicate both that GNVQ offerings have tended to stabilise very quickly; and that there is likely to be very little change in the immediate future. Figures A.9 and A.10 show the GNVQs offered by those centres (colleges, schools and sixth form colleges) where we have full matched data for all three years surveyed. The incremental change between phases 2 and 3 is far smaller than that in the preceding two years in every case but one (the tiny Intermediate Manufacturing GNVQ). Centres seem to decide quite early on which courses they will offer, and remain with that choice. **It is also the case that the *relative* popularity of these courses has remained the same - the pattern initially established in 1993-4 has not been significantly altered.**

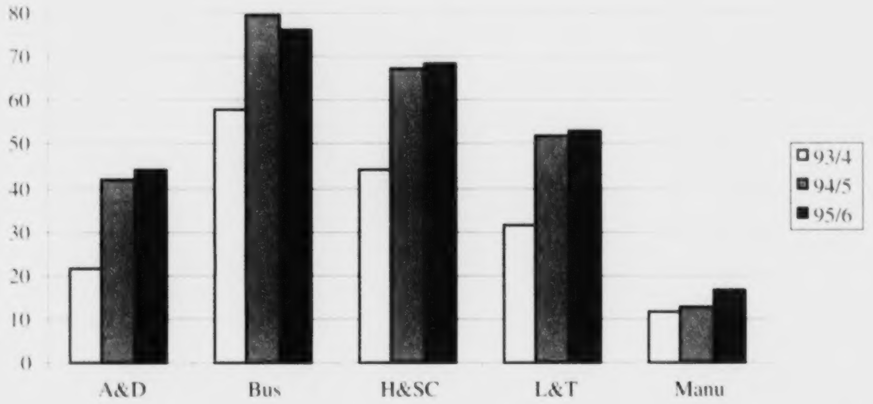

Figure A.9. Percentage of centres offering Intermediate GNVQs 1993-4, 1994-5 and 1995-6 (n = 79)

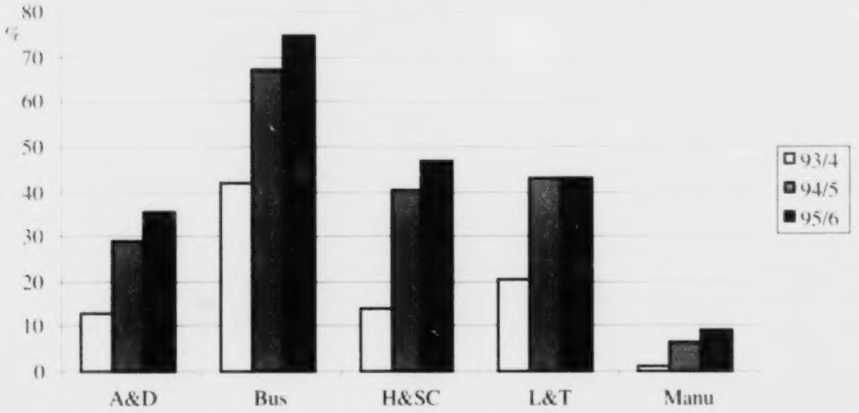

Figure A.10. Percentage of centres offering Advanced GNVQs 1993-4, 1994-5 and 1995-6 (n = 79)

Table A.1 shows a comparable pattern of stability for the 1994-7 period, and so includes courses which became generally available in 1994-5. In this case, the figures relate to all centres for which full data are available for 1994 onwards.

	% offering 1994-5	**% offering 1995-6**	**% expecting to offer 1996-7 (as stated summer 1996)**
Art & Design Advanced	29	33	39
Art & Design Intermediate	43	46	48
Business Advanced	64	72	78
Business Intermediate	79	78	85
Construction & BE Advanced	7	7	9
Construction & BE Intermediate	5	9	12
Hospitality & Catering Adv.	5	7	12
Hospitality & Catering Int.	7	11	16
Health & Social Care Adv.	40	47	56
Health & Social Care Int.	69	72	74
Leisure & Tourism Advanced	38	43	50
Leisure & Tourism Intermediate	54	54	64
Manufacturing Advanced	5	9	12
Manufacturing Intermediate	13	17	18
Science Advanced	16	28	28
Science Intermediate	16	15	23

Table A.1. Current and future GNVQs: Percentages of centres offering different options (n = 95)

As noted above, registering as a centre for a given GNVQ is not the same thing as offering it. (Nor is an offer any guarantee that a course will run. The average gap between numbers offered and numbers run in 1995-6 was 14% for both Advanced subjects and Intermediate courses.) Nonetheless, NCVQ's figures for approved centres provide further evidence of likely trends; and they also point to an *essentially stable pattern of provision, dominated by a few titles*. For example, of the current 2,122 approved schools, only 25 (1%) are registered for Construction & the Built Environment at Intermediate level, and 2 schools in total for Advanced; 125 (6%) have registered for Intermediate Hospitality & Catering, but only 28 (1%) for Advanced; 47 (2%) for Intermediate Media, and 26 (1%) for Advanced.

Unlike the schools, the majority of FE colleges tend to *register* for a large range of titles. However among the newest titles, which so few actually offer (see figure A.3 above), even this is not true. Our data indicate that about 15% of colleges offer Advanced Manufacturing, but 65% are registered to do so. In the case of Advanced Retail, this registration figure drops to 16%; and for Advanced Performing Arts to 10%.

A3 WHICH GNVQS DO STUDENTS TAKE?

While students' GNVQ choices are obviously constrained by centres' offers, courses can and do fail to run because of low recruitment, while others recruit with very different success. This section therefore examines the development of student enrolments since 1993.

In 1993-4 there were already more school centres than FE or sixth form college ones, though less markedly so than in later years. However, the balance of students gives a quite different picture. As figure A.11 shows, the majority of GNVQ *students* were to be found in the FE sector. This was also true within each of the GNVQ areas, though to varying degrees - most so in Art & Design, least in Business or in the tiny Manufacturing group.

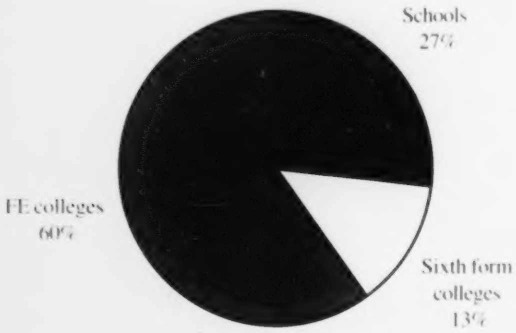

Figure A.11. The student sample: distribution across institutions in 1993-4

However, as noted above, in the following years school registrations increased markedly. Figures on average enrolments, collected from our respondents, allow us to estimate corresponding shifts in the balance of enrolments between sectors. (NB: this requires us to assume that average enrolment numbers are the same in 'new' school centres. See Appendix I.)

Overall, these calculations suggest that in 1994-5 of overall Intermediate and Advanced GNVQ enrolments 55% were in FE colleges, 11% in sixth form colleges and 33% in schools. However, schools are much more likely to offer Intermediate than Advanced courses. Allowing for this produces the estimates in Table A2. These estimates must be treated with caution, since they assume *both* that the ratio of registration to actual offerings is the same in all sectors, *and* that average group sizes are the same for early-entry centres (our sample) and later ones. However, they are consistent with a separate set of calculations based on DfEE statistics for colleges and NCVQ registration numbers; a calculation which indicates that 55% of Intermediate students are in the FE and sixth form college sector combined (and so 45% in schools).[6]

	Advanced		Intermediate		All students	
	1994-5	1995-6	1994-5	1995-6	1994-5	1995-6
Schools	25%	27%	46%	48%	33%	37%
Sixth form colleges	10%	10%	7%	10%	11%	10%
FE Colleges	65%	63%	46%	42%	55%	53%

Table A.2. Distribution of GNVQ students between sectors: 1994-5 and 1995-6 (estimates)

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[6] DfEE Statistics of Education: Students in Further Education 1994/5 (HMSO 1996) covers the combined FE/sixth form college sector, and is itself based on information derived from a variety of sources and combined using a number of conversion algorithms. DfEE figures are for November and their total number of GNVQ Level 2 students can therefore reasonably be compared with total Intermediate registration figures for 1994-5 (Source: NCVQ). However, Advanced student numbers are less easy to interpret. Table 11 of Students in Further Education 1994/5 indicates that 76% of enrolled Advanced GNVQ students are in the first year of their course. Since total Advanced registrations were almost twice as high in 1994-5 as the previous year, and the drop-out rate was very high (see below and Robinson, 1996) this is perfectly possible. However, without independent information on differential drop-out or shifts in registration between sectors, these statistics cannot be used to calculate the overall percentage of Advanced students in colleges. The DfEE's estimates, using its combined data sources for the college sector, indicate that, in 1994-5, 71% of Advanced 1st years were in FE or 6th form colleges; our estimate, based on centre returns, is that 75% of all Advanced students (1st and 2nd years combined) were in colleges, FE and sixth form colleges.

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Student enrolment numbers do not alter the general picture given above: that of an already stable GNVQ sector, dominated by a few subjects. However, student and course distributions are by no means identical.

Figures A.12 and A.13 are based on NCVQ registration data, provided by the awarding bodies. (The corresponding tables appear in Appendix III.) There are considerable variations between subjects in the numbers dropping out of the course (permanently and temporarily), as well as in the proportions actually achieving a full award. *These differences tend over time to increase the proportions of students who are studying Art & Design and Business.*

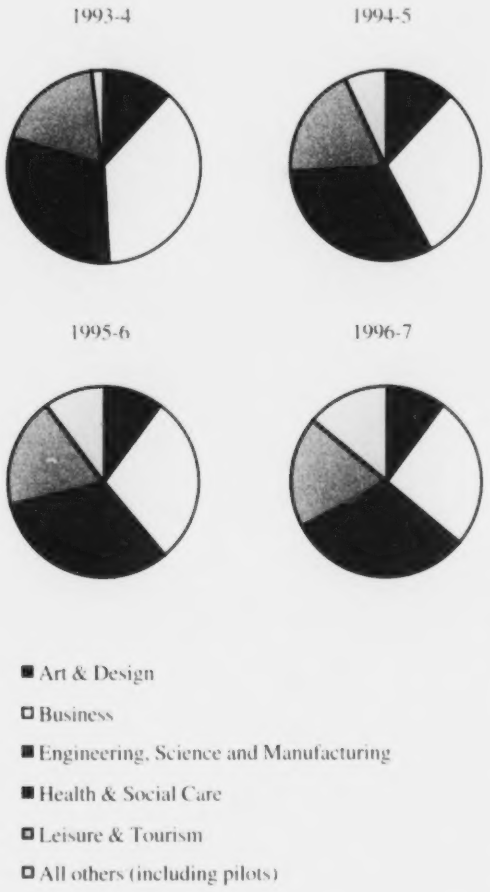

Figure A.12. Proportions of registrations for different Intermediate GNVQs (Source: NCVQ)

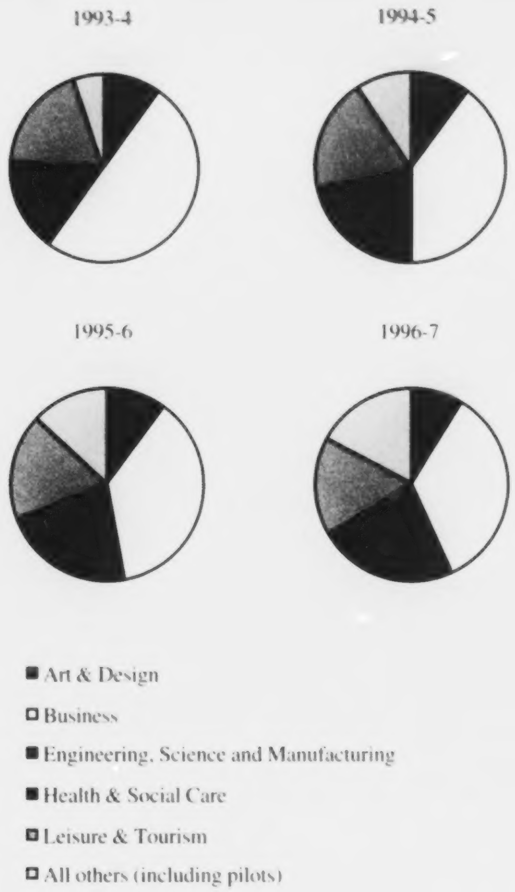

Figure A.13. Proportions of registrations for different Advanced GNVQs (Source: NCVQ)

In the previous section we noted the tendency of course offerings to stabilise very quickly, with few centres even planning to widen the selection of GNVQs they offer. Student numbers show a similar pattern. Since 1993-4, ten new subject areas have become generally available in addition to the original five. In the circumstances, the real surprise is how little change Figures A.12 and A.13 show there to have been.

Among the most recent GNVQs, the dominant pattern is for a new title to establish a small market at the start, and for that market to remain, in proportional terms, much the same from then on. For Science, Hospitality & Catering, and Construction & the Built Environment at both Intermediate and Advanced levels, the pattern is one of more or less total stability over a three year period.

Among the original GNVQs, especially at Advanced level, we again find that the 'market share' of Art & Design, Health & Social Care and Leisure & Tourism shows very little change over time. The only exception is Business. Its early dominance was enormous, and most of the (modest) growth in new areas has been at its expense. Its importance remains, nevertheless, enormous (with over 50,000 registrations a year for Intermediate plus Advanced). **Overall, the 'big 4' continue to recruit over three-quarters of GNVQ students at both Intermediate and Advanced Levels.**

ENTRY CRITERIA FOR GNVQ COURSES

Numbers enrolling on different GNVQs represent student demand, centre decisions about what to offer, but also decisions by centres about whether an individual student is actually suitable for a course. On the one hand, funding mechanisms and competition between institutions give centres a strong incentive to enrol as many students as possible. On the other hand, FE colleges now face an element of outcome-related funding which gives them good reasons not to recruit students on to a course if they are unlikely to cope with it. Such a situation is also, of course, demotivating for students and teachers alike.

Most centres have clear, formal criteria for Intermediate and Advanced GNVQ entry. Equally, most centres do not, in practice, maintain these. In the first year of the study, many of the coordinators and team leaders interviewed during site visits described problems in recruiting for the first year of a new award. Many emphasised the need - at Advanced and Intermediate levels - to tighten entrance criteria next year: experience had, they argued, made this self-evidently necessary.

We have no reason to question their sincerity. Equally, we found no evidence, in subsequent years, of consistent or noticeable 'tightening' of criteria. The introduction of Foundation GNVQs has created a new pathway for a student group, some of whom may have been recruited on to Intermediate courses in 1993-4. However, as section D describes in detail, the prior qualifications or academic profile of Intermediate and Advanced students has remained effectively unchanged throughout the term of this study.

Table A.3 summarises formal academic entry criteria in 1993-4 and 1995-6, combined for the four 'big' GNVQs. (Criteria for the others are broadly similar.) Although there have been some shifts, and although most centres also give alternatives (interview/profile etc.), there remains a commitment to a clear 'desirable' academic entry level in most schools and colleges. Yet these levels are not ones which most students actually attain. The *average* GCSE attainment for Advanced entry is less than 4 Cs: very few have Cs in English *and* Maths. Similarly, the *average* Intermediate entrant has achieved fewer than 4 GCSE D grades. **Formal criteria continue to reflect aspirations rather than the reality of recruitment patterns and pressures.**

Intermediate		
	1993-4	**1995-6**
At least 4 C/D inc. Maths and English	5.7	8.2
At least 4 C/D, any subjects	5.7	20.5
Lower GCSEs	37.3	23.8
Advanced		
	1993-4	**1995-6**
At least 4 Cs inc. Maths and English	8.7	15.5
At least 4 Cs in any subject	63.9	49.5
4 C/D	9.4	3.5
Other GCSE requirements	5.0	-

Table A.3. Selected formal entry criteria for GNVQ courses: combined data for Business, Art & Design, Health & Social Care, and Leisure & Tourism (% of centres)

A4 HOW ARE GNVQS DELIVERED?[7]

GNVQs have a unit structure (see Appendix IV) and, in the wake of recent reports (notably the Capey report and the Dearing recommendations on 16-19 education), individual units are acquiring more rather than less importance in assessment and accreditation terms. Our survey results indicate that units have always been the prime teaching unit. Although GNVQ guidance has tended to encourage integrated, cross-unit approaches, centres have tended overwhelmingly to deliver GNVQs unit by unit - either sequentially (a unit each half term) or by running two units a term side by side. The only exception to this pattern is Art & Design, where almost half the team leaders prefer a more integrated approach.

While teaching follows a fairly uniform structure, the time devoted to GNVQs has been far more variable (and difficult to track).

Between 1993-5 (the period for which we collected detailed data), the number of hours of teaching time devoted to the GNVQ varied from 5 to 25 hours per week. This was true for both Intermediate *and* Advanced levels. It was interesting to note that in all cases, for both Intermediate and Advanced GNVQs (with the exception of Advanced Art and Design), the modal number[8] of hours allocated was 12. However, answers were not clustered around this value. On the contrary, distributions were generally very flat, typically with standard deviations of about a third of the mean, and frequencies for modal values of around 15-20%. Where greater consistency did emerge was among those respondents who report a delivery pattern of two units per term. In this group, teaching times do tend to cluster around approximately 12 hours per week, with typically around 50% of responses falling in the 10-15 hours per week range.

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[7] These issues are discussed at considerable length in the first and second interim reports of the project (Further Education Unit, Institute of Education and The Nuffield Foundation (1994) GNVQs 1993-4: A National Survey Report, and Further Education Unit, Institute of Education and The Nuffield Foundation (1995) GNVQs 1994-5: A National Survey Report. London: FEDA).

[8] i.e. the number of hours which was the single most often cited answer

Responses for numbers of hours per week *timetabled* for the GNVQ were generally, as one would expect, higher than the number of hours of teaching time. Again there is a considerable spread, partially due perhaps to the fact that whereas some centres will expect their students to undertake a certain amount of private study each week in their own time without specifying when this should be, in others this appears explicitly on the timetable. Figure A.14 illustrates responses regarding teaching and timetabled times using Intermediate GNVQs in Business as an example.

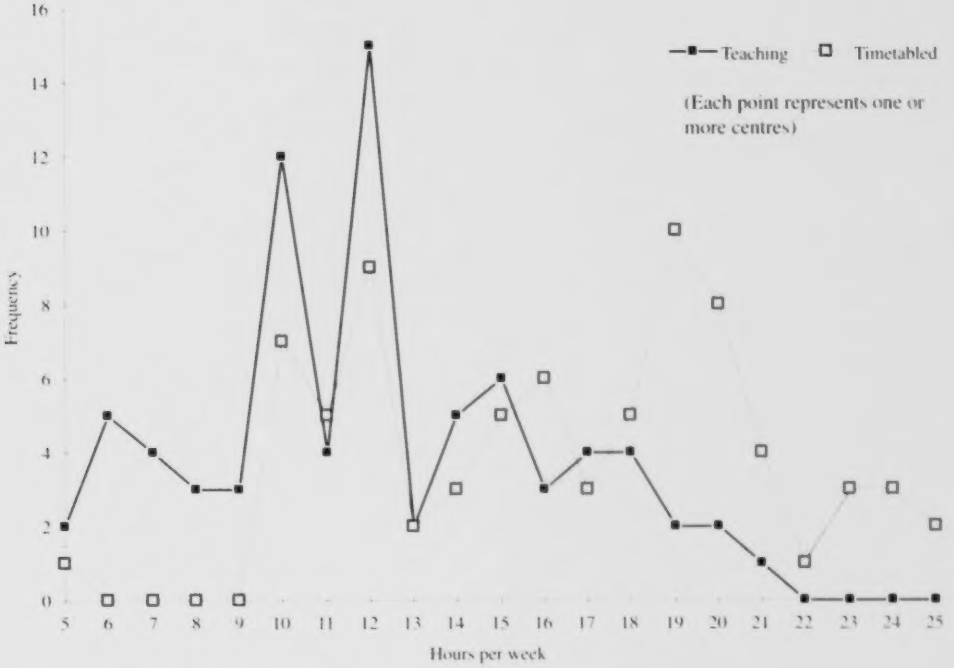

Figure A.14. Teaching and timetabled times - Intermediate Business GNVQ: 1993-4

For 1994-5, further information on timetabling was collected from the students themselves. For full time students the range of hours for first year Advanced courses was from 7 to 26 hours a week. The mean was 14.2 hours, with a standard deviation of 4.6 much the same degree of variability as the previous year's responses. Only 12.5% recorded more than 18 hours a week devoted to their GNVQ; 29% recorded 11 or 12 hours. The highest figures were consistently reported by Art and Design students. If we look at all students except Art and Design the mean number of hours reported is 13.2 hours rather than 14.2, with almost all students (93%) falling within the range of 7 and 18 hours.

Second year students' responses showed a rather different pattern, in that we do not find anything like such a clear difference between Art & Design and other subjects. The mean number of hours given to mandatory plus optional units was slightly lower - 13.4 rather than 14.2 - but this difference does not reach statistical significance. The standard deviation was also slightly lower, indicating rather more clustering - 53% of students reported between 10 and 14 hours on the 'basic' GNVQ - but there is still very large variation in the amount of timetabled time.

This degree of variability in teaching and contact hours is in marked contrast with, say, the standardised timetables of schools delivering the National Curriculum. However, there is some evidence from site visits that, in the last year, financial stringency and the nature of FEFC funding formulæ have been creating greater uniformity in the FE sector.

Another area of considerable variability has been the size of student groups. As is implied by the distribution of students between colleges and schools, the former tend to recruit larger numbers for a given course. This is partly because they may have several groups following the same programme, whereas it is most unusual for a school to have more than one; but they are also less likely to run a course with a single-digit enrolment.

	FE Colleges		**Sixth form colleges***		**Schools**	
	1994-5	**1995-6**	**1994-5**	**1995-6**	**1994-5**	**1995-6**
A & D	24	20	11	12	7	6
Business	29	27	21	32	10	12
H &SC	17	15	25	17	10	10
Hosp & C	17	15	-	-	-	3
L & T	28	26	18	11	12	10
Science	17	12	8	-	9	8

**NB: Small sample size affects the reliability of the 6th form college data.*

Table A.4. Average size of group: selected Intermediate GNVQs

Table A.4 records the average number of students recruited for Intermediate courses by sector. As such, it illustrates clearly the differences between colleges and schools (for whom the vast majority of students - over 90% - are recruited from their own Year 11 students).[9] However, it is also important to emphasise that **these averages summarise highly variable recruitment levels even within a sector**. Figures A.15 and A.16 illustrate this for two of the Intermediate GNVQs, but the picture would be very similar for any Intermediate or Advanced subject. The tiny size of some GNVQ groups is difficult to justify in the long term, and must involve some considerable cross-subsidy by other courses.

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[9] This figure comes from the survey of individual students reported in Parts C and D

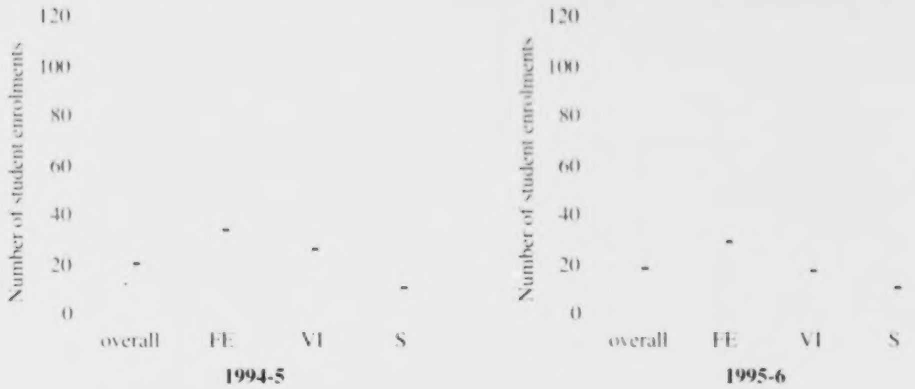

Figure A.15. Health & Social Care Intermediate: range of enrolments

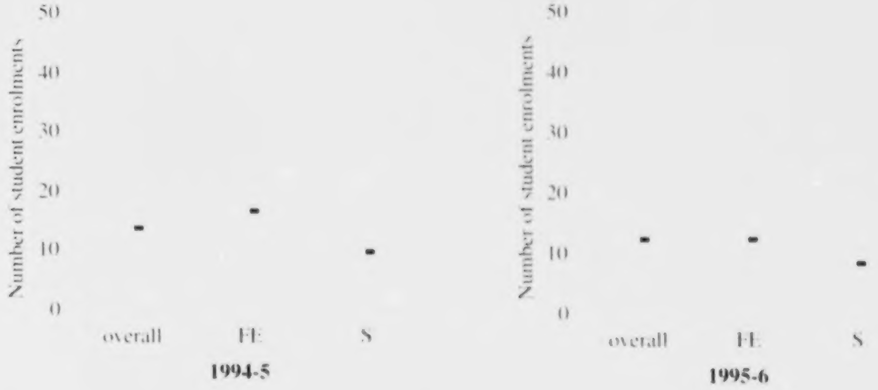

Figure A.16. Science Intermediate: range of enrolments

Key: Each line runs from the maximum to the minimum enrolment reported: and marks the mean for that sample, e.g.

Health & Social Care 1994-5: overall maximum 78, overall minimum 1, mean 19.4

CORE SKILLS[10]

'Variability' is also the main conclusion that can be drawn about core skills delivery by centres. In our first interim report, we noted that there was very wide variation in the pattern of core skills delivery; and that a given centre frequently might report quite different approaches for each of its GNVQ titles. It was very difficult to classify delivery methods with any degree of precision, because of this variability and because a given form of words might subsume a number of quite different approaches. In our case study visits, we also found that almost every centre - no matter what its current practice - was planning changes for the following year. Almost no-one was satisfied with their arrangements, and all reported spending large amounts of time discussing and planning core skills delivery.

All of the above findings remained equally applicable a year later. In the majority of cases, centres had changed their practices since the previous year, and plan further changes for the next. Many continued to have a different approach for each GNVQ. It also remains very difficult to classify practices. Almost all centres claim to 'integrate core skills'. However, one centre may mean by this that specialist core skills staff teach particular parts of unit assignments (and assess the core skills) while other staff teach and assess the rest of the assignment. Another centre, using the same form of words, may have all core skills teaching and assessment carried out by 'vocational' staff. Table A.5 shows current delivery patterns for case study centres using our best attempt at a set of clear and inclusive categories.

It is also clear both from these results and from staff comments that **core skills delivery is highly problematic for GNVQ teams**. Core skills requirements often do not fit easily into GNVQ teaching or assessment: even those centres which felt that they had developed assignments which covered core skills well remarked on the assessment problems involved. Separate delivery was seen as simplest but also most foreign to GNVQ philosophy and requirements. However, a number of centres - those which saw GNVQs as essentially 'educational' rather than 'vocational' qualifications - did query the integrationist approach.

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[10] We refer to 'core skills' rather than 'key skills' throughout this report as this was the term current during data collection

	Number (n = 56)	Communication (n = 52)	IT (n = 53)
Complete integration	6	20	9
Workshops available but not timetabled: otherwise fully integrated	2	2	-
Leading of teaching/assessment on to some units	2	2	1
'Dummy' units for core skills purposes	1	2	1
Some special assignments	7	3	3
Separate workshops timetabled	10	8	11
Specialist teachers plus specific core skills assignments	4	4	4
Taught quite separately	24	11	24

Table A.5. Core Skills: Patterns of delivery
(Numbers refer to vocational areas/courses, not centres)

In the final two years of the study we collected data directly from students on core skills delivery: or rather on what they recognised and experienced as relating to core skills.[11] It is notable how few only 8% had any idea whether or not they had been accredited on core skills; and their description of teaching time should be interpreted accordingly. The most recent data for the first year of Advanced courses come from Intermediate students who are now on Advanced courses, and who responded to follow-up questionnaires. Two-thirds of these (n = 154) were able to provide core skills information. Table A.6 reports on the time committed *for those reporting some instruction*. It may frequently reflect ignorance of when 'core skills' are involved. Nonetheless, it is striking how little, and how variable, the instruction is which they report.

	Communication	Number	IT
1 hour	69	72	58
2 hours	18	22	26
3 hours	9	4	9
4 hours	2	1	5
> 4 hours	2	1	2

Table A.6. Core skills hours per week Advanced GNVQ Year 1 (1995-6): % reporting (n = 154)[12]

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[11] The difficulty of interpreting programme data was one reason why we asked students directly whether they received (or at least were aware of receiving) separately timetabled core skills.

[12] One third of the sample provided no information on core skills.

Table A.7 summarises responses for second year Advanced students (most of whom are not also taking GCSE resits). It gives the number of hours which students report spending on separately timetabled core skills - i.e. time which is not part of teaching for a 'vocational' unit or for a GCSE retake.

	Communication	Number	IT
1 hour	21.1	25.6	26.9
2 hours	4.3	8.0	17.1
3 hours	1.1	1.2	4.6
4 hours	0.3	0.4	0.8
> 4 hours	-	0.1	0.5
No separate tuition reported	73.1	64.8	50.1

Table A.7. Separately timetabled core skills: Advanced GNVQ Year 2 (1995-6): % reporting (n = 990)

We are surprised at the high proportion of second year respondents who report no separate Communication or Application of Number teaching at all. In the first year of this study (1993-4) about two-thirds of GNVQ subject team leaders reported some separate timetabling of core skills. Programme data for 1994-5 (Table A.5 above) indicated that about half of all GNVQ programmes offered separate teaching for number and IT, with only 10-15% opting for complete integration; although in communication only a fifth chose total separate teaching compared to two-fifths for total integration.

The difficulty of identifying core skills instruction may partially explain the low figures, but it does not account for year on year differences. In the first cohort of respondents (taking Advanced GNVQs in 1993-5) timetabled core skills were reported more frequently. Just under half of that group reported separate IT & Application of Number in Year 2 of their course.

Another possible reason for the apparently sharp drop between this earlier cohort and their successors may be that the wording of the relevant question was changed somewhat. Although the intention was to be clearer, questionnaire responses are notoriously sensitive to wording. However the reported fall may also be a genuine one, and represent either a move to more mixed strategies, or (more probably) the continuing downward pressure on timetabled hours and costs per student.[13]

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[13] More detailed analysis of the core skills responses shows that the number of hours reported is strongly associated with which GNVQ a student is taking. Table iii in Appendix III summarises these findings.

Successful completion of an Advanced GNVQ requires steady progress over the two years, in completion of portfolio work and in passing the external unit tests. This is a central and intended feature of the award's design; and teachers of GNVQs try to impress on students the impossibility of leaving most work to the last minute, as they may have been able to in GCSE courses. While it is impossible to know how much this feature of GNVQs contributes to non-completion rates, which are currently very high, we decided to examine whether students' progression rates were associated with their course, institution or with other structural variables.

Advanced level respondents were asked to record their progress in completing the portfolio-based work for a unit and in passing the unit tests. This information was collected either a little before or at the end of their fourth term on the course, when they received the first follow-up questionnaire. An Advanced GNVQ involves completion of 8 mandatory and 4 optional units,[14] which our surveys indicate are typically taught on a 2-a-term basis. A student who was completing their work as they went along would therefore have completed at least 6 and perhaps 7 or 8 units by the time the questionnaire was received. (It is in fact very common for students to receive initial feedback and grading for a unit, but with suggestions on what additional work is needed to achieve a pass/improve the grade. Completion of 8 units by this time would therefore be relatively unusual.)

In fact, **students' rate of progress turned out to be remarkably variable**. As figure A.17 demonstrates, 42.5% - less than half - of the respondents had completed the portfolios for 6 or more units at this point. The mean number of portfolio units completed was 4.56 (SD=2.58).

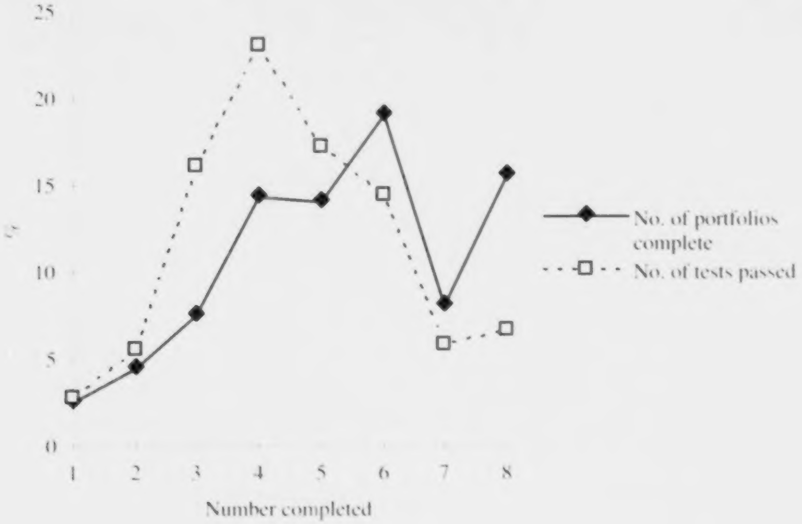

Figure A.17. Percentages of second year Advanced students reporting different numbers of tests and portfolios completed: winter 1995-6

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[14] See Appendix IV

There is considerable variation between institutions in students' rate of progress. Figure A.18 shows the average number of unit portfolio completions and the average number of tests passed for students at each of the centres attended by 5 or more student respondents. This ranges from a low of 2.75 for portfolios and 2.3 for tests to a high of 6.3 and 5.6 respectively.

While an individual's institution only 'explains' a small amount of the variation in test and portfolio completion, it is nonetheless significant. In some institutions the average completion rate is substantially higher or lower than one would expect by chance. There is a great deal of difference among students, and much of the variation shown in figure A.18 relates to this. Some GNVQs are also associated with higher or lower completion rates; this also affects centre comparisons (since centres vary in what they offer). *Nevertheless*, the institution a student attends also seems to make a significant difference to their rate of progress.[15]

Overall, the survey data on course delivery generally underline large differences between centres with respect to their GNVQ programmes. The current state of GNVQs appears to be one of **enormous stability in offerings and recruitment patterns combined with continuing, major variability in actual delivery of the programme.**

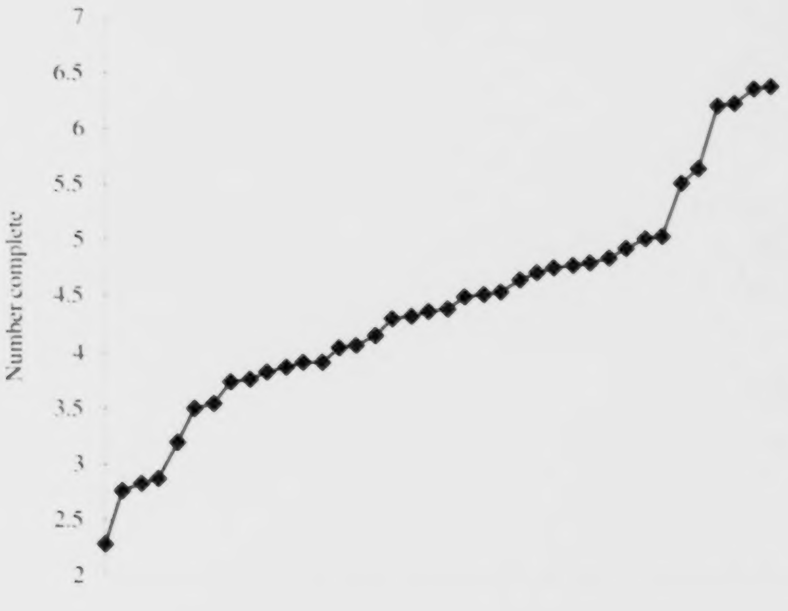

Figure A.18. (a) Average number of portfolios completed by centre: Advanced students winter 1995-6 (each point = one centre)

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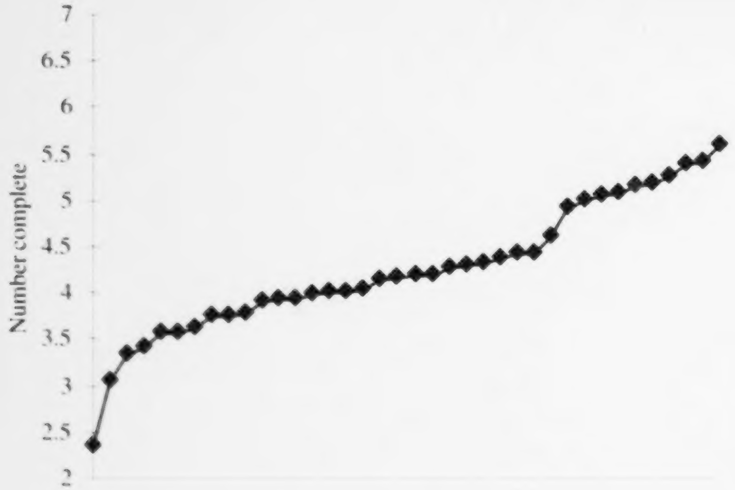
[15] An analysis of variance indicates that, while about 94% of the variance in completion rates exists within groups (i.e. that in any given institution, there is a lot of variability) 6 or 7% can be ascribed to 'between group variance': in other words to the institution which the student attends. F ratio is 3.0476 (prob <.0000) for portfolio completion and 2.2208 (p = <.0008) for test completion



(b) Average number of tests completed by centres: Advanced students winter 1995-6 (each point = one centre)

A5 SCHOOLS OR COLLEGES: THE CHANGING PATTERN OF PROVISION

The White Paper which launched GNVQs specified that the awards should

> be suitable for use by full-time students in colleges, and *if appropriate in schools*......(italics ours)

The phrase comes almost as an afterthought. Yet the decision to make GNVQs generally available for school-based provision has probably done more to change the nature of vocational education for young people than any other of the White Paper's recommendations.

At the start of the 1990s, vocational education, whether narrowly or broadly defined, was effectively the prerogative of either further education colleges or specialist training providers. There had, of course, been a number of attempts to cater for what was known as the 'new' sixth form - young people wanting to stay on after GCSEs for whom A levels were clearly not appropriate. But these had not been a great success. CPVE - the Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education - had been greeted with enormous initial enthusiasm, but had failed to develop a clear role as either an educational qualification or something with any workplace relevance or market value. Enrolments tailed off far short of their target, and the award was phased out.

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In the years immediately before GNVQs were introduced, City & Guilds offered schools the DVE (Diploma in Vocational Education), and BTEC began to approve schools to offer First Diplomas. Permission was also granted in principle for schools to offer National Diplomas, but it was difficult to meet the approval criteria, and at the time that GNVQs appeared, not many schools had even tried. The dominant sixth form offerings were, instead, A levels or a programme of GCSE re-sits.

The GNVQ framework provided a clear, national set of alternative qualifications, available through all the awarding bodies, and, in principle, to all schools; and did so at a time of major changes in the organisation and the financing of schools. Decentralisation of control within LEAs, the advent of grant-maintained schools, a policy of parental (or student) choice, and strong financial incentives to increase enrolments all coincided with the opening up of the vocational education market. Pressures on the awarding bodies ensured that they, in turn, would compete very actively to register new centres.

The result, as described in detail above, has been an explosion in the number of centres which offer full-time 'vocational' courses. Schools have competed actively for post-compulsory GNVQ students, encouraging them to stay in school rather than move to a college - just as they have always done with candidates for A level. At the time of writing, a quarter of Advanced GNVQ candidates and almost half of Intermediate ones are to be found in schools: - which also means that they are in institutions where rather few staff have any industrial experience, and where the range of subjects offered is, and is set to remain, quite limited.

A concrete example will illustrate how major the transformation has been. A grant maintained school, with permission for a new sixth form, is offering its first sixth form intake 6 subjects at Foundation GNVQ; 5 at Intermediate; and 4 at Advanced - 15 GNVQ groups in all. The 'traditional' qualifications of A level and GCSE no longer dominate. Thirteen A levels are offered, but only 5 sixth-form based GCSEs.

We do not think this change in provision patterns is likely to be reversed. Rather, policy-makers need to take far greater account than to date of what it implies for the nature of GNVQs. Is the conception and design of GNVQs suited to a qualification which is delivered, so often, in schools, whose dominant culture is that of academic study for young people many years removed from the labour force? Is the resulting pattern of GNVQ subject choice one which policy-makers envisioned? And is it reasonable to expect school-based provision to deliver not only a broad education but also an underpinning to specific vocational NVQs?

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B: Have GNVQs become 'the applied pathway'?

B1 INTRODUCTION

In launching GNVQs, the (then) Department of Education stated government policy to be that 'GCE A level and GNVQ systems should provide the main basis for the programmes of study of students aged 16-19 in full-time education' (DFE 16.4.93). Three years later, Sir Ron Dearing confirmed this position. He recommended that the government should 'bring the present academic, applied and vocational pathways into a common framework covering all achievements' (Dearing 1996 para 3.4). The overarching framework Sir Ron proposes combines a number of levels with these same three 'academic', 'applied' and 'vocational' pathways, labelled respectively A levels, GNVQs and NVQs.

How far has the education system in fact been moving towards this neat tripartite position, for 16-19 year olds or more generally? This study's brief was the evolution of GNVQs, not NVQs. It therefore has relatively little to say about the latter, although sections C and E below discuss at some length the extent to which NVQs are taken by GNVQ students, and their generally small role in the studies of the 16-19 age group. However, throughout the period, we have monitored in some detail the extent to which GNVQs have taken over, or altered the size and nature of what Dearing calls the 'applied' pathway.

It is not at all obvious that 16-19 education, let alone post-compulsory education as a whole, fits into the neat tripartism of the Dearing framework (see especially Stanton (ed) forthcoming). However, GNVQs were launched into an educational sector in which there certainly already existed many alternatives to A levels, or to NVQs and other highly specific vocational awards. The DfEE, in its official statistical publications, has now taken to calling this group 'GNVQ precursors' - implying that they are giving way, and will eventually give way entirely, to GNVQs.

To determine whether this is happening, or likely to happen, the study has examined why institutions have, or have not, adopted GNVQs; how far GNVQs are replacing pre-existing qualifications and how far being used to introduce options not previously available; how fully they are meeting the needs and demands of different student groups; and how far, or why, older qualifications are being retained. A major source of information has been a rolling programme of site visits and interviews carried out with individual institutions from our sample - schools, colleges and sixth form colleges. In addition, we have collected extremely detailed enrolment data from a group of institutions around the country who offer GNVQs and who serve a wide variety of communities. These data are discussed in detail in an accompanying publication; but major findings are summarised here (Wolf 1997). Finally, we have drawn on our postal survey of coordinators and on national data made available by the DfEE, NCVQ and EDEXCEL. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

B2 REPLACEMENTS OR NEW VENTURES?

We estimate that, overall, a majority of GNVQ courses are new ventures rather than replacements for existing courses. However this is far more the case for schools than for colleges, and indeed to a large extent reflects the major change created by GNVQs in the institutions where 'vocational' or 'applied route' students are to be found.

Table B.1 below summarises the extent to which, during 1993-5, centres in our sample introduced GNVQs as new ventures or as replacements for existing courses.

		New %	Replacement %	N %
Art & Design	Intermediate	**66**	34	62
	Advanced	**64**	36	39
Business	Intermediate	47	**53**	119
	Advanced	**52**	48	90
Health & Social Care	Intermediate	**56**	44	103
	Advanced	50	50	56
Leisure & Tourism	Intermediate	**63**	37	86
	Advanced	**55**	45	56
Manufacturing	Intermediate	**53**	47	19
	Advanced	**83**	17	6
Construction & Built Environment (1994-5)	Intermediate	14	**86**	14
	Advanced	0	**100**	11
Hospitality & Catering (1994-5)	Intermediate	38	**62**	8
	Advanced	10	**90**	10
Science (1994-5)	Intermediate	**57**	43	14
	Advanced	38	**62**	16

Table B.1. Proportions of GNVQ courses which are replacements or new ventures, 1993-5 (Larger proportions shown in bold.)

In interpreting these figures it is important to underline that absolute numbers of responses for Manufacturing, Construction & the Built Environment, Hospitality & Catering and Science are small. It is nonetheless apparent that, across all post-16 education, these more recent GNVQs are less likely to be introduced as new ventures and more likely to replace existing courses than was the case with the first five GNVQs.

This difference is itself to be explained almost entirely by a single fact: the newer GNVQs are found largely in colleges, the older ones in schools as well. Table B.2 summarises the differences between colleges and schools in our sample. In colleges a very large proportion of GNVQ courses are direct replacements for existing courses. In schools, the reverse is the case - most GNVQs are new ventures for the institution. Breaking out the figures for Intermediate and Advanced would make the contrast even clearer. For example, over the period of the study, 100% of Art & Design Advanced courses started by sample schools were new ventures; and so were 94% of their Advanced Leisure & Tourism programmes.

	Schools	**VIth Form Colleges**	**FE Colleges**
New venture	72%	53%	31%
Replacement:			
BTEC (First or National)	3%	23%	53%
DVE/CPVE	18%	12%	3%
A Level	0.5%	2% (N = 1)	0.5% (N = 1)
NVQ	-	-	0.5% (N = 1)
Other (inc. unspecified)	6.5%	10%	12%

Table B.2. Extent to which GNVQs replaced existing awards: 1993-5

WHY WERE GNVQS INTRODUCED?

In 1994, in the first Interim report of this study, we noted:

> 'We found little evidence of centres introducing GNVQs because of intrinsic features of the awards or a well-researched preference for GNVQs over other qualifications…' (FEU et al 1994: p. 20)

A year later we emphasised

> 'the degree to which GNVQs have become a vehicle for direct competition between schools and colleges.' (FEDA et al 1995: p. 23)

In the following years, nothing has happened to alter either of these conclusions.

In the case of centres replacing older courses - especially FE colleges, but also schools replacing DVE/CPVE - GNVQs were introduced essentially because of the perception that this was government policy; and that all centres would have to make the change at some point. In some cases advice that an existing award would be phased out came directly from the awarding body; more often, members of the senior management team would see the change as necessary and (therefore) desirable, and take action to persuade teaching staff to plan for and implement the changeover.

At Advanced level there has been and continues to be considerable ambivalence about the change (discussed further below). At Intermediate, in contrast, very few staff regret the passing of BTEC First or DVE, of which there were many criticisms. However, many continue to question whether Intermediate GNVQs as currently constituted are suitable for all the students who traditionally might have taken the older awards. (Foundation courses, they note, are very unpopular with 16+ students and parents, being seen as a step backwards.)

For centres considering new ventures, the logic was similar. College managers argued that it was obviously better, when starting a new course, to develop something that would be around in the future rather than an award which might shortly be phased out. For schools, the great attraction of GNVQs was the ready opportunity they provided to run vocational courses, broadening their sixth forms, providing alternatives for non-A level students, and allowing them to compete directly with colleges in a financial climate that encouraged maximum enrolments. They chose GNVQs because they wanted to offer something broadly vocational and full-time, not vice versa.

Interviews conducted in 1997 do not provide any different rationales from those offered in 1993 or 1994. Schools regard GNVQs as the obvious - often the only - vehicle for expanding their sixth form options. Senior college managers generally reiterate that their institution's policy is to phase in GNVQs to replace and build on existing provision cumulatively and 'as appropriate'. Yet, as we discussed in section A, the newest GNVQs have had very modest take-up; and at the level of specific plans, our survey responses do not provide evidence of any major growth planned for the next year or two. There are two reasons for this, we believe: the competition between sectors referred to earlier, and the nature and content of GNVQs.

GNVQs AND SPECIALISED PATHWAYS

One of the major issues for the future flagged by the study's first report was

> 'the serious doubts among teaching staff as to whether existing and planned GNVQs can provide satisfactory substitutes for the many quite specialised vocational qualifications which currently are offered in further education… and which have not been, and will not be, converted into NVQs' (FEU et al 1994: p. 56).

Staff in FE site visits centres argued that there existed a large number of awards which were not suited to an NVQ approach, and whose constituencies would not wish to take an NVQ; but which were nonetheless offering clear pathways into employment and also much more highly specialised than the Advanced GNVQs which were supposed to replace them. These concerns have not vanished. They are reiterated in the most recent set of interviews, where managers and teaching staff are alike in seeing the clients for these awards and for GNVQs as quite separate and distinct.

In our first set of site visits particular concern was expressed that GNVQs were not suitable for **part-time study**. A year later, their lack of suitability for **adults** was more frequently raised - something that was seen as partly inherent in the way the awards were designed (and in particular the difficulty of delivering them other than to full-time students); but also a matter of perception. The award's image was that of a school-leavers' award - as, indeed, is implied by the government's own descriptions - and therefore not attractive to or suitable for adults. These concerns overlap, since part-timers and adults are also considered to be especially interested in the more specialised vocational awards.

The data presented below in Part C confirm that GNVQ students are indeed overwhelmingly full-time and young. However, this does not mean that the other client populations identified by FE respondents have now been left without any alternatives. On the contrary: the courses identified as quite distinct from GNVQs mostly still survive.

B3 ALTERNATIVES TO GNVQs

The colleges visited for the most recent set of interviews (1997) varied considerably in the number of GNVQs they offered, and in the percentage of their 'level 3' course which were GNVQs (see section B.4 below). However, every single one of them had retained courses leading to qualifications of the type discussed above: relatively specialised, but not NVQs, and closer to Dearing's 'applied' route than to something entirely practical and skills-based. Of this type of qualification, by far the largest group consists of BTEC National Diplomas (full-time) and BTEC National Certificates (part-time). We have therefore looked at these in some detail, but would emphasise that the BTEC awards co-exist with other thriving qualifications of this type.

In interviews with college managers about their current range of qualifications and courses we found that:

- Every college visited, without exception, emphasises the distinct nature of the 'market' and client group for, on the one hand, GNVQs, and, on the other, National Diplomas/ Certificates etc.

- The older and more specialised qualifications are seen as more suitable for, and more attractive to, adults and part-timers. National Diplomas are seen as having a 'more mature' recruitment profile than GNVQs. National Certificates *designed* as part-time qualifications, are seen as for adults in work. Managers report that adults who want general education enrol for Access courses rather than GNVQs. Such courses are generally described as 'very healthy', 'flourishing, with huge numbers wanting progression to HE', 'increasingly successful - a growth area'.

- The majority of managers state that their college's policy has been and continues to be conversion of existing courses to GNVQs as the latter come on stream. However, a number now complement this by stating that it is a *priority* for their college to widen its Diploma offerings (and even reintroduce awards that had been phased out) in order to increase the variety and flexibility of college offerings. A few state quite clearly that they see National Diplomas as something which colleges can offer and schools cannot; and therefore as something which their college is promoting to attract students.

- Recruitment in the 16-18 age range is highly dependent on, and related to, policies in local schools. Colleges rarely see school leavers as a growth market, although they are an important percentage of the student body.

THE NATIONAL PICTURE

Recent national data for GNVQs, and for BTEC National Diplomas and Certificates indicate how far managers' and lecturers' perceptions reflect the national picture. This section therefore looks in some detail at recent trends for GNVQs alongside those for BTEC National Diplomas and Certificates. While this only provides a partial picture - omitting, for example, higher level certificates from CGLI, RSA, NNEB etc. - BTEC awards are numerous and an obvious target for future replacements involving GNVQs. The BTEC awards provide a good general proxy for those awards which the DfEE considers as 'GNVQ precursors', and which, in the Dearing framework, sit uneasily between the current categories of 'applied' GNVQ and 'vocational' NVQ.

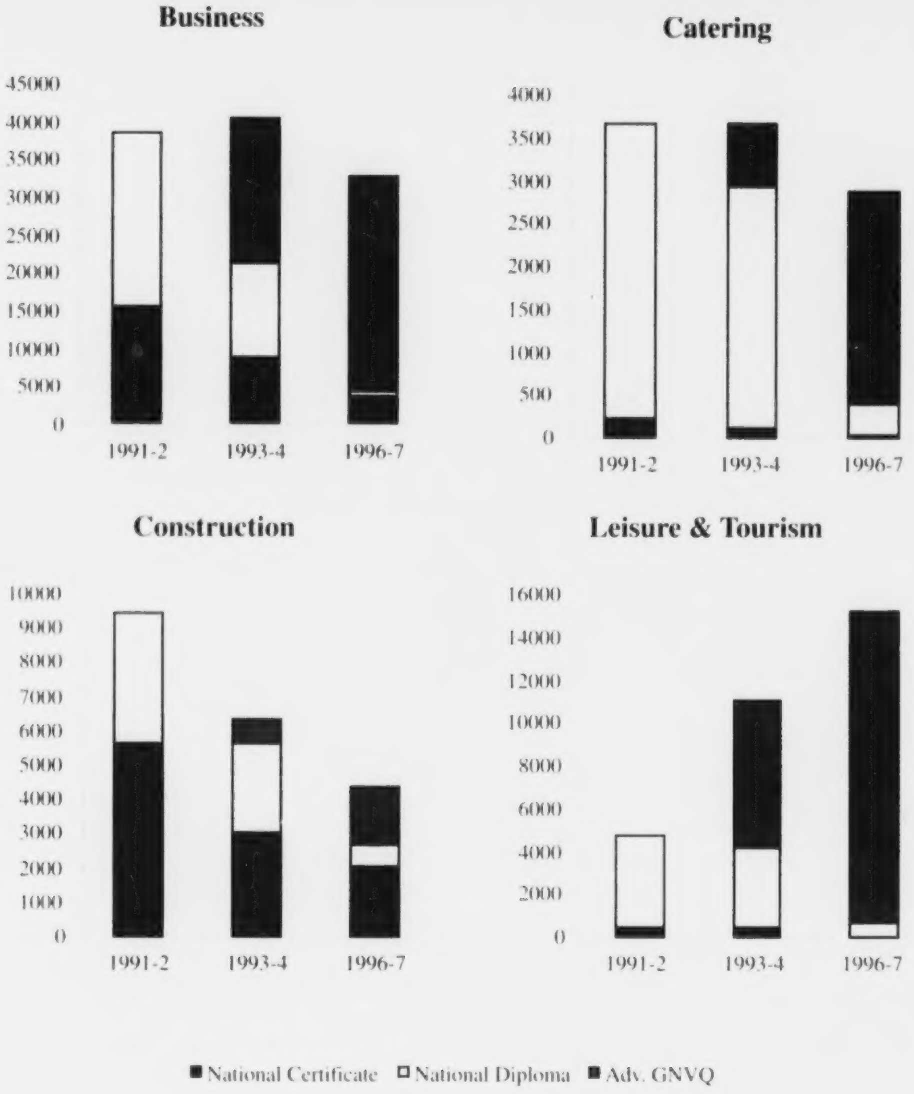

Figure B.1. Registration patterns in selected vocational areas and years: combined BTEC National Diploma, National Certificate and Advanced GNVQ registrations

Figure B.1 summarises what has happened to registrations for the groups of National Diplomas and Certificates offered by BTEC in four areas - two of the original 'big 4' and the more recent Hospitality & Catering and Construction & the Built Environment. It also compares them directly with Advanced GNVQ registrations in these fields. The picture here is certainly of wholesale replacement - Diplomas in Business, Construction, Leisure/Tourism & Catering/Hotel/Hospitality have effectively disappeared from post-compulsory education.

Figure B.1 also gives a new perspective on the low numbers registering for Catering & Hospitality, and for Construction & the Built Environment - examples of the second batch of GNVQs, and offered very rarely outside FE. This low take-up is not, it would appear, because of the persistence of directly competitive awards. On the contrary: there has been wholesale replacement of National Diplomas, just as described by college managers. But numbers were low in the first place; and in the period covering the move to GNVQs have fallen somewhat rather than rising. (Direct comparisons for Engineering are complicated by the large number of awards, and the emerging dual use of NVQs and GNVQs for New Apprenticeship schemes; but the picture appears to be similar.)

However, the trend has not been the same for all subjects and vocational areas. Figure B.2 shows comparable figures for the Caring/Health & Social Care, Art & Design and Science fields. Here replacement has been partial at best. Although total numbers in these areas have fallen over the period 1993-7, absolute numbers not only remain quite high, but are actually higher now (1997) than in 1991-2 for all three of these groupings. They reflect the specialised options referred to by many of our interviewees, and visible in college prospectuses - for example Childhood Studies (Nursery Nursing), Photography, Graphic Design .[1]

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[1] In fact the real puzzle, given current competition between schools and colleges, is the absence of more specialised Tourism diplomas.

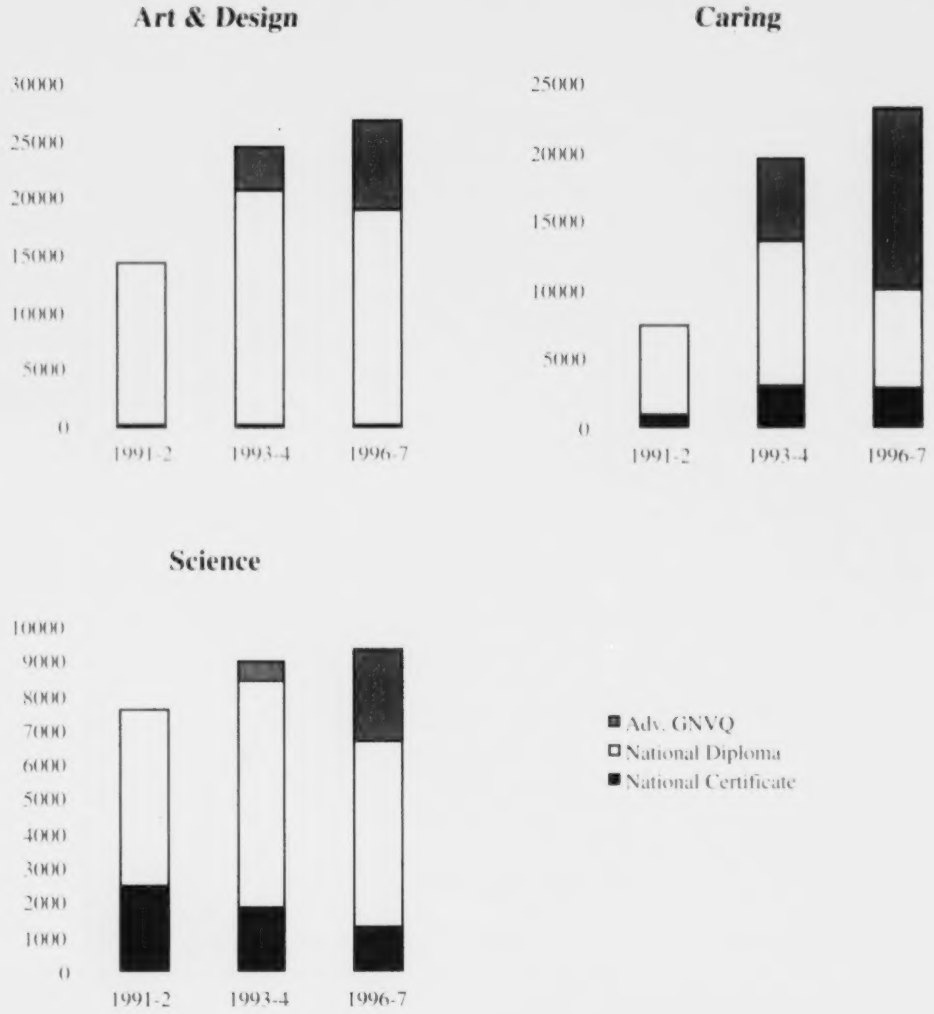

Figure B.2. Registration patterns in selected vocational areas and years: combined BTEC National Diploma, National Certificate and Advanced GNVQ registrations

So far, the national figures bear out the account provided by individual centres; but it is worth looking, finally, at some of the very newest areas; new for GNVQs but also for other awards.

At centre after centre, in the last two years, we have been told that IT courses are a huge success. Colleges offer a variety of qualifications - some BTEC, but many from other awarding bodies. Yet while GNVQ registrations for IT have shown moderately healthy growth, they are hardly enormous: 9% of 1996-7 Intermediate registrations, and 8% of Advanced. These GNVQs have been generally available now for some time; and centres were well aware, in advance, of the timetable for piloting and introduction. The decision to put so much of their effort into other IT awards is therefore a conscious one.

Even more striking is the pattern for Media & Performing Arts registrations, where very few of our responding centres report any intention of moving to GNVQs in the near future. These, too, are new areas, rather than ones with established specialist routes into employment; and ones where, again, the timetable for GNVQ introduction was clear. Figure B.3 shows graphically the increase in the very recent past of National Diploma and Certificate registrations; and compares it with the pattern for GNVQ registrations. In this case, we would hypothesise, a slightly different dynamic is at work. Four years ago, centres assumed that they would be forced into GNVQs, and sooner rather than later. This is no longer universally the case.

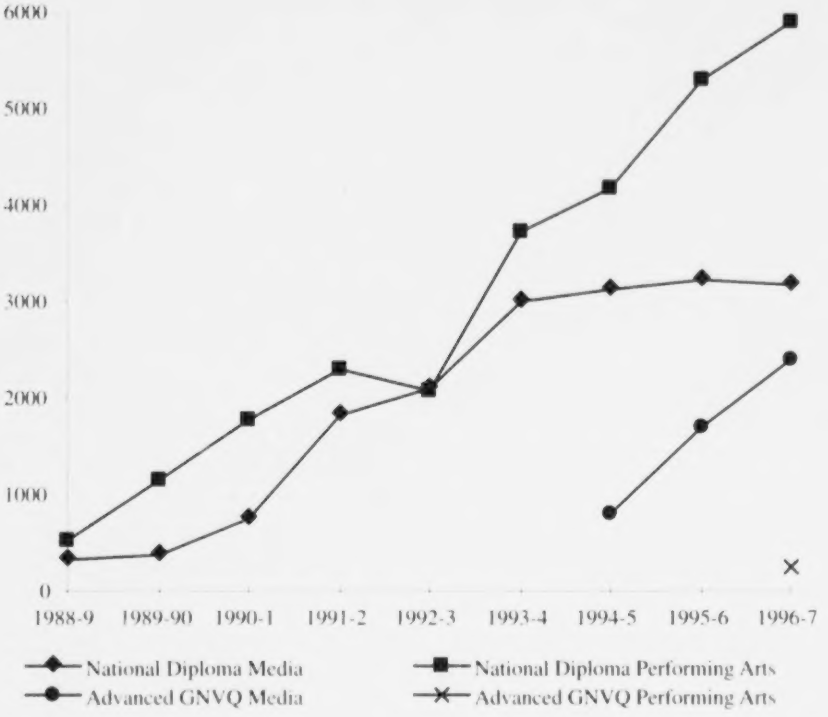

Figure B.3

Figure B.4 also suggests that colleges may no longer be assuming that GNVQs are bound to take over, and conversely that they are appraising the 'competitive advantage' that non-GNVQs offer them vis-à-vis schools. This figure plots the growth of Advanced GNVQs overall against the total number of BTEC National Diploma registrations in the last decade. Following rapid growth in the late '80s and early '90s, National Diploma registrations fell sharply, as colleges switched to Advanced GNVQs (and also lost custom to schools who had never been Diploma centres). However, in the last two years, the rates of both increase and decrease have slowed markedly. While the trends are likely to continue, at the current rate one would predict co-habitation for many years to come.

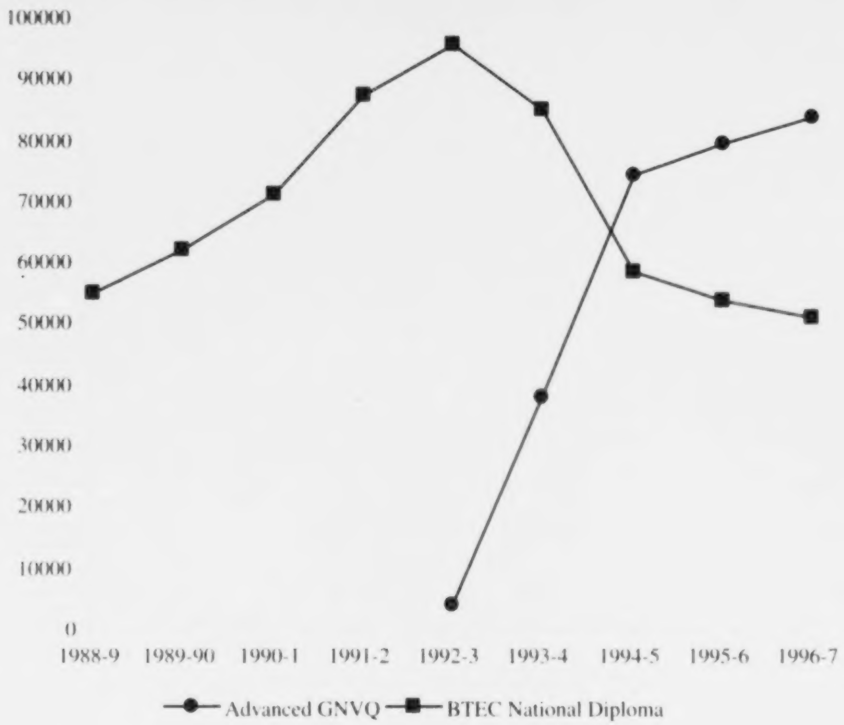

Figure B.4. Patterns of growth for level 3 'general' vocational awards

THE NATURE OF THE STUDENT MARKET

In discussing recruitment and their decisions over programme offerings, centres in most areas schools and colleges acknowledge intense competition for school leavers. College respondents, in particular, are convinced that they have lost out to schools, in spite of the generally growing participation rates in this age group. Most argue that the school-leaver cohort is neither actually nor potentially a growing market for them.

Centres also, in the most recent sets of interviews, have consistently emphasised the decline of day release - described as 'vanishing', 'practically disappeared' - and the effect of this on what they offer. While National Certificates are almost universally to be found in college prospectuses, and will be maintained while and for as long as there is demand, this is an area which is characterised as both custom-made for working adults, and as under threat from both employer practices and funding mechanisms.

B4 THE SIZE OF THE 'APPLIED' PATHWAY

Figure B.5 shows the total number of Advanced GNVQ and BTEC National Diploma registrations as a percentage of age cohorts. (Diplomas again stand proxy here for the larger group of comparable awards.) In relating the number of registered students to the relevant 'market' or 'client group', it is difficult to know which cohort to choose. Advanced GNVQs recruit partly from 16 year olds, but also from older students who have entered via an Intermediate or other award; National Diploma students are similar in their age profile but (see below) may include more older students. The problem is compounded by year-on-year changes in birth rates and so in cohort sizes, which can be quite large.Thus, looking at numbers taking taking GNVQs or Diplomas as a proportion of 16 year olds may suggest substantial shifts over time; but relating qualification numbers to the size of the whole client population may give quite a different picture. In figure B.5 we have corrected for this to some extent by (a) using two-year cohorts as a baseline and (b) repeating the exercise for 16/17 and 17/18 year olds separately.

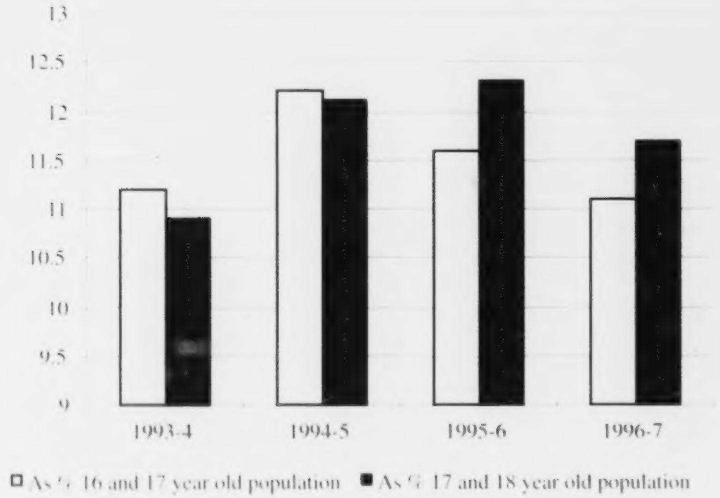

Figure B.5. BTEC Diploma and GNVQ Advanced registrations as a percentage of target age groups (England) (Source: NCVQ and BTEC)

What figure B.5 indicates is that, in relation to these awards' primary and largest target group, overall recruitment has not changed very much in recent years. (This contrasts with very rapid growth in the late '80s: see figure B.4) The proportions taking Advanced GNVQs or National Diplomas in 1996-7 are down somewhat over the previous year; more significantly, **there is no evidence of any steady upward trend following the introduction of Advanced GNVQs.**

In this situation, colleges are almost certainly correct to feel that they are losing custom to schools - who, while they offer fewer options, and recruit smaller groups, are nonetheless now teaching about a quarter of Advanced GNVQ students (see Section A.3 above): In the absence of any obvious increase in overall take-up of 'level 3' awards, they are also probably right in their conclusion that school-leavers are no longer a growing market, least of all for the college sector.

The effect of Intermediate GNVQs has been rather different, and is discussed at some length in Spours (1995) and by the FEFC (1997). There is quite conclusive evidence that here, the introduction of GNVQs has changed the pattern of qualification take-up more substantially. Rather than simply substituting for CPVE/DVE and BTEC First Diplomas[2], Intermediate GNVQs have also been displacing GCSE resits. Spours estimates that overall participation rates for the combination of GCSE resits and Intermediate or Foundation GNVQ rose somewhat from 1991-3, and then fell back again from 1993-5. Relative stagnation in the size of this group overall, combined with the huge increase in the proportion of Intermediate GNVQ students in schools, will again have **reduced the college share of this market substantially.**

QUALIFICATIONS AND AGE GROUPS

As noted above, our college respondents generally emphasise the 'distinct nature' of current National Diploma and GNVQ recruitment; and see the former as less overwhelmingly for school-leavers. However it is National Certificates which they pinpoint as a non-NVQ vocational award for adults; one which is nonetheless in decline.

National figures, as well as detailed college records (see below), confirm that this picture of National Certificates is correct. Figures B.1 and B.2 above consistently indicate, for a variety of specific fields, declining absolute and relative numbers for National Certificates. Overall, registrations have more than halved over the last decade: from 51122 (1988/9) to 23087 (1996/7). While this reflects the decline of day-release rather than anything to do with GNVQs, it is important to reiterate that GNVQs are not providing alternative part-time courses, or attracting adults - in other words, **the adult share of this 'general vocational' or 'applied' pathway is declining**. Adults are well represented in specific skills courses of various types, but as Table B.3 shows, they are very poorly represented among GNVQ groups even when only college students are examined. (Including school-based students in the GNVQ group obviously greatly increases the percentage of young participants.) Are adults in post-compulsory education increasingly to be found in only two of Dearing's pathways? and does that matter?

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[2] all of which have totally or virtually disappeared

	16-18	19	20-24	Over 25
Intermediate GNVQ	88	3	4	5
GCSE	28	4	18	50
Advanced GNVQ	79	7	7	7
'GNVQ precursor'[3] level 3	56	10	16	18
A/AS Level	66	4	10	20

Table B.3. Age distribution of FE students for major level 2 and 3 awards: England 1994 (percentages)
Source: Statistics of Education: Students in Further Education 1994/5. DfEE. ISSN 1362-0010.

COLLEGE RESPONSES: A DISPARATE SECTOR

National trends often subsume wide variations in practice. This is certainly the case with the provision of 'applied' level 3 qualifications. The college sector in England, Wales & Northern Ireland operates within a very wide range of circumstances. Colleges vary in terms of their place in the overall organisation of post-compulsory education and training in the area, and the degree of competition they face with schools and other colleges; the demands and support offered by the local economy; the degree of institutional continuity; and the strategies adopted by senior management. All of these factors affect the number and variety of qualifications offered by a college. They also underline how difficult it is to develop a simple set of centrally-regulated qualifications which are equally suited to different local situations.

Table B4 summarises the characteristics of 'applied level 3' provision in a sample of different colleges - a subsample of the institutions whose student data we have examined in detail. (see Wolf 1997) These institutions were chosen to represent a very wide range of communities - geographically, by size, and in whether their catchment area was predominantly rural, suburban or urban. A couple of those included here are tertiary colleges. The group also turns out to vary enormously in the extent to which they face head-on competition with many, or a few, schools. One faces no real competition at all, reflecting a late 1980s reorganisation of post-16 education which has survived up to 1997.

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[3] Including National Diplomas and National Certificates.

College	GNVQ courses: average % of students <19	National Diplomas: average % of students <19	National Certificates: average %of students <19	Ratio of GNVQs: National Diplomas (less than 1.0 signifies more NDs than GNVQs offered)
1	83	82	28	0.3
2	90	74	22	1.1
3	94	90	47	1.75
4	62	13	2	3.2
5	86	69	31	1.2
6	79	63	41	0.6
7	68	63	53	1.66
8	97	99	24	1.2
9	89	77	52	1.8

Table B.4. GNVQs and level 3 BTEC awards in selected colleges

Note: These colleges are institutions where we were able to obtain full age-cohort data for the relevant programmes. We requested numbers under 19. In some cases only numbers ≤19 were available; but the same definition was used across the institution. Comparisons at this level are therefore based on equivalent numbers.

The patterns of recruitment and provision summarised in Table B4 are highly varied. Some colleges have emphasised GNVQs heavily at the expense of BTEC Diplomas. In others, Diplomas heavily outnumber GNVQs. We cannot discern any consistent association between the choice made here and any other college characteristics; not with location, not with size, nor, most surprisingly, with the degree of local competition. This may change in the next few years, depending on how far central authorities renew their efforts to promote a single qualification for this pathway; but at the moment it is the enormous variation in colleges' response which is most striking.

The second lesson that can be drawn from this table is that the clientele for full-time awards is, generally, a young one; and that the difference between Diplomas and GNVQs is not as marked as managers often perceive it to be. It is true that the average age of BTEC Diploma students is consistently higher than for GNVQs. (There is one exception; but in that case the proportions under 19 are 97% and 99% respectively.) However, in most cases the difference is not enormous. In colleges where GNVQs have a very young student body, Diploma recruitment is predominantly young as well. In those few colleges which have managed a substantial GNVQ recruitment aged over 19, Diploma courses also recruit from a population significantly older than the sample average.

The big contrast is, as college managers predicted, between full-time courses and National Certificate ones. In this declining sector the overwhelming majority of students are adult (19+). The huge increases which colleges report in adults on access courses, which are largely *non-technical and non-scientific*, needs to be evaluated alongside

- first, the rapid decline in the traditional area of technician education represented by National Certificates
- second, the overwhelmingly non-technical and service weighting in GNVQ recruitment, described in section A above
- third, the apparent stagnation in total take-up of 'applied' awards.

We return to these themes in the concluding section of the report.

C Who takes GNVQs

C1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the report discusses in further detail the characteristics of GNVQ students. Part B above outlined the age profile of GNVQs, and this is explored in greater depth here, along with new data on students' plans and aspirations, study programmes and progress.

The information is derived from two samples of students (Intermediate and Advanced) who were surveyed

- in early 1994 and in winter 1994/spring 1995 (cohort 1: sweep 1 and sweep 2)); or
- in winter 1994/5, spring 1996 and winter 1996/spring 1997 (cohort 2: sweep 1, sweep 2 and sweep 3).

Detailed results for the first cohort, and preliminary results for the second have been described in earlier publications.[1]

The first cohort comprised early GNVQ students, who were in a position to complete an Intermediate GNVQ in 1994 or an Advanced GNVQ during the summer of 1995. These students were surveyed through their colleges or schools in the summer of 1994 and then through a follow-up questionnaire in early spring 1995. The results provided some valuable and unique information on students' backgrounds and aspirations; but also showed the usual sharp drop-off in response rates between original survey and follow-up. The original sample size was 1,103. The numbers providing full responses to the follow-up questionnaire was 449: 38% of the Intermediate and 43% of the Advanced group. Any further attrition would make it difficult to draw any conclusions about the GNVQ population as a whole. Rather than follow this group any further, we therefore decided to carry out a second, larger survey of both Intermediate and Advanced students, and to follow them over a longer period.

This second cohort were first surveyed during their first year on a GNVQ Intermediate or Advanced programme, in winter 1995 (having started their GNVQ in the autumn of 1994). They were re-contacted in the spring of 1996, at which point those who were still following an Advanced GNVQ programme and planning to enter higher education had already submitted their applications; while Intermediate students would have completed their course and proceeded to other studies or the labour market. They were surveyed a third and final time in winter 1996/7. The original sample size for the second cohort was 3,574.

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[1] FEU et al (1995); FEDA et al (1996); Scharaschkin (1996) Wolf (1997)

A detailed discussion of the sampling method used for this part of the study is provided in Appendix VII. The students were originally sampled through their institutions, which were all part of our original institutional sample. While these institutions were nationally representative in 1993, large numbers of schools have, as discussed earlier, started to offer GNVQs in the last two to three years. This has led to an under-representation of school-based students in the sample, especially at Intermediate level. In reporting overall (national) results for the first year responses a weighting scheme has been used to correct for this; and statistics quoted below are our best *national* estimates for 1994-5 1st year Advanced and Intermediate students. A separate smaller-scale survey of GNVQ students in schools was also carried out to check the accuracy of results pertaining specifically to school students.

First sweep data are available for 2,229 first year Advanced students; and for 1,345 Intermediate (3,574 in all). As with the first cohort surveyed, there was considerable attrition. There were 1,525 responses to the first follow-up (1,004 Advanced and 521 Intermediate) and 1,173 to the second (805 Advanced and 368 Intermediate). Results of the second and third sweeps have not been weighted, however, but are reported as received. The major reason for this is that attrition is not random. For both cohorts, respondents to follow-up questionnaires *over-represent the more successful students*. This tendency means that we have relatively little data for GNVQ drop-outs - for example, only 48 (5%) of the 1004 Advanced students replying to the second sweep questionnaire in 1996 had stopped studying, and 86% of those responding to the third sweep had completed their GNVQ (Intermediate or Advanced).

National figures for non-completion of GNVQs indicate that these success rates introduce a serious imbalance in the follow-up samples. NCVQ data indicate that, at Advanced level, 58% of second year Advanced students who took some sort of test in 1995-6 obtained a full award. However, as a percentage of 1994-5 registrations, this falls to 42%. For our second cohort of Intermediate students, the relevant year is 1994-5, when nationally the number obtaining full awards was 37% of those registering.

Successful '3rd sweep' respondents make up, numerically, 30% of our original Advanced sample, and 35% of our Intermediate one. If our sample was fully representative at sweep 1, this means that close to all the original Intermediate sample who completed their GNVQ also responded to follow-up questionnaires; and that most of the Advanced 'completers' did too. In fact, by the time of the first sweep there had almost certainly been some drop-out - our most recent (1995-6) centre data show an average drop-out from Advanced courses of about 20% by February of the first year. Nonetheless, the responses can certainly be seen as providing a very high response rate from among successful GNVQ students, from which one can quite confidently generalise to national patterns. The same is not true for the unsuccessful.

The other reason not to weight responses to the second and third sweeps is that, especially at Advanced level, absolute numbers of school-educated respondents are very low. As discussed in section A, we estimate that about

25% of Advanced students are in schools; but the nature of our sample, and low response rates from some institutions, reduced this further. The combination of small numbers and biased response rates make it impossible to generalise to e.g. national level differences between schools and colleges on a subject by subject basis.

In discussing the results of the student surveys, most attention will be given to the second, larger and more recent cohort (2,229 Advanced students and 1,345 Intermediate). Comparisons with the first cohort will focus on the degree to which the stability in provision discussed in Part A is echoed in the characteristics, aspirations and experiences of GNVQ students.

Table C.1 gives the breakdown of respondents to the first survey questionnaire by subject area. For comparison, figures based on NCVQ data on 1994-5 GNVQ enrolments are also provided. These refer to the 162,851 GNVQ registrations in 1994-5 - NCVQ collects and collates registration data from the three GNVQ awarding bodies. Although the number of GNVQ *registrations* is not the same as the actual number of GNVQ *students*, it is the best estimate of student numbers available, and breaking numbers of registrations down by subject, as is done in table C.1, provides a check on the representativeness of the sample.

GNVQ subject	**Sample (%)**	**NCVQ 94-5 data (%)**
Art & Design	11	11
Business	33	34
Construction & Built Env	2	2
Engineering	1	2
Health & Social Care	20	22
Hospitality & Catering	2	3
Information Technology	2	2
Leisure & Tourism	20	19
Manufacturing	1	1
Media Communications & Prod	1	1
Science	7	3

Table C.1. GNVQ subjects of respondents

Science was intentionally oversampled (in order to be sure of collecting adequate data to profile Science students, in whom our funders have a special interest): 7% of survey respondents were taking Science GNVQs, whereas the national figure for 1994-5 estimated by NCVQ is roughly 3%. Otherwise the sample is fairly representative in regard to GNVQ subject area.

C2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ADVANCED GNVQ STUDENTS

GNVQ Advanced students are **overwhelmingly young and overwhelmingly full-time**. 98% of respondents were full-time in both the cohorts surveyed, and over 95% came to their GNVQ course directly from other full-time studies.

Figure C.1 shows the age distribution of Advanced GNVQ respondents of whom 94% were 19 or under in September 1994.

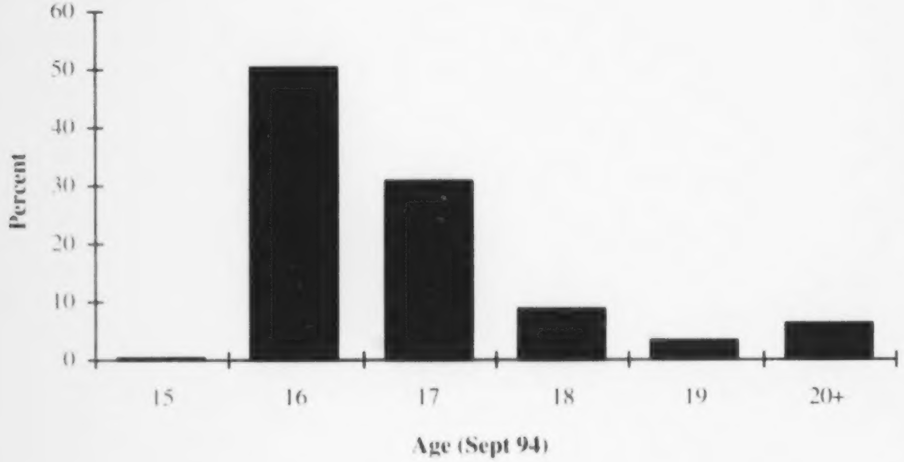

Figure C.1. Age distribution of Advanced respondents: September 1994 (1st year students weighted)

Figure C.2 summarises the breakdown of the group by subject and gender. As in 1993-4 the sample overall was 48% male and 52% female.

When we compare these results with previous years' data, the overwhelming impression is indeed one of stability. The introduction of new GNVQs has made little difference to the courses studied or to the nature of the student body. Enrolments are overwhelmingly concentrated in the 'big four' subjects; and even the gender distribution is much as before. (The only exception is that Business is rather less popular with girls than in 1993-4, and Health and Social Care even more so.) Gender balances are highly conventional, with the possible exception of Business which tends to be seen as more 'female' than it actually is.

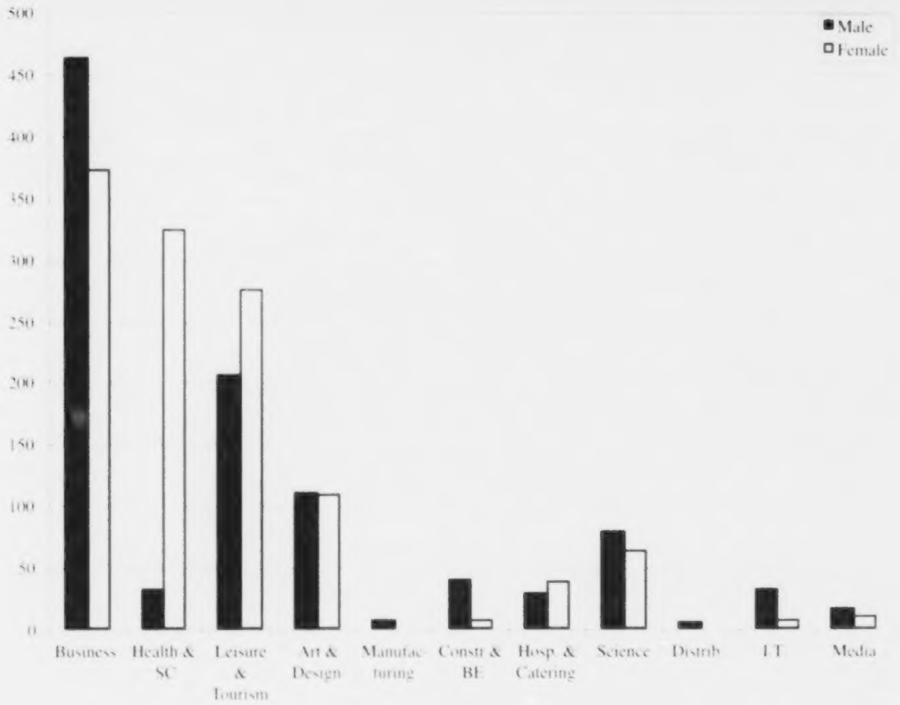

Figure C.2. 1st year Advanced GNVQ respondents (1994-5) by subject and gender

GCSE ATTAINMENT

Data on Advanced students' prior qualifications again indicate that GNVQs have very quickly established a clear and stable niche in the qualifications 'market'.

Table C.2 shows the number of GCSE awards at C or above obtained by Advanced students in 1994-5. It is very similar to the pattern obtaining in 1993-4 (cf. 1993-4 report, p. 25).

Number of GCSE awards at C or above	%	Cumulative %
0	12.1	12.1
1	10.2	22.3
2	11.5	33.8
3	14.9	48.7
4	12.8	61.5
5	11.8	73.3
6	9.5	82.9
7+	17.2	100.0

Table C.2. Percentage of Advanced GNVQ students gaining GCSEs at C and above (1994 entry: weighted)

The figures shown in Table C.2 are very similar to those for the previous year, though with rather higher proportions at both extremes (0/1 grades A-C; or 6+ grades A-C). The average number - between 3 and 4 GCSE grades A-C - is identical in both years.

During visits to GNVQ centres, coordinators and senior staff often commented on the effect on Advanced entry criteria of competition between centres. These comments were generally along the lines of: 'If we were as strict as we would like about entry criteria, they'll just go and register elsewhere'; or 'We are quite demanding - but we know students we turn down just go down the road'. While there may indeed be effects of this type locally, our sample (see Figure C.3) show no overall differences between schools, 6th form colleges and FE colleges in average entry qualifications.

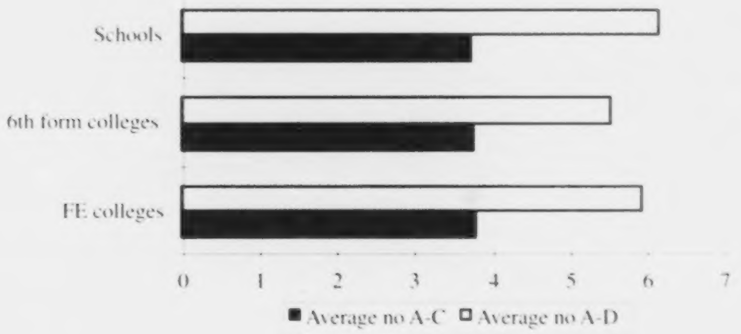

Figure C.3. Average number of GCSEs grades A-C and A-D achieved by Advanced GNVQ students, by institutional type

DIRECT AND INDIRECT ENTRY

Government policy, confirmed in 1996 by its acceptance of the main Dearing report recommendations, is that

> GCE A Level and GNVQ systems should provide the main basis for the programmes of study of students aged 16-19 in full-time education. (DfE 16.4.93)

Advanced GNVQs are defined as being the same level as A Levels, with one Advanced GNVQ equivalent to two GCE A Levels. There is, however, a major difference between patterns of entry for the two awards. The vast majority of 16-19 year olds who are studying A Levels begin their courses straight after GCSE. Although the GNVQ student population is overwhelmingly concentrated in this age group, **less than half of Advanced GNVQ students enter their programme straight after GCSE**. Again, this figure applies to both cohorts.

Some students take a year between GCSEs and Advanced GNVQ entry: others longer. Table C.3 indicates that the difference between direct and indirect entry is closely related to prior academic performance.

	All Advanced students (N=2229)	**Those taking GCSEs in 1994 (N=989)**	**Those taking GCSEs in 1993 (N=656)**	**Those taking GCSEs before 1993 (N=373)***
% obtaining ≥5 A-C	38.7	55.2	16.8	16.4
% obtaining ≥4 A-C	52.0	72.6	34.9	38.8
% obtaining ≥4 A-C, including ≥C in English†	47.5	67.7	31.1	33.2
% obtaining ≥4 A-C, including ≥C in Maths	32.6	47.9	20.7	20.1
% obtaining ≥4 A-C, including ≥C in Maths & English	29.5	44.1	17.8	17.7

Table C.3. GCSE results of Advanced students (1994 entry)

** There were 211 respondents who did not give the year they took their GCSEs*
† 'English' means 'English Language or English Literature (or both)'

Direct entry candidates had significantly higher GCSE grades than did the larger group of 'deferred entry' students.

Nearly all those students who took their GCSEs in 1993 (i.e. a year earlier than the start of their Advanced course) said they had been studying in the intervening year. The most common course listed was a GNVQ (39% of group), followed by a BTEC First (16%). A considerably smaller fraction were taking a BTEC First than had been the case in the previous survey, reflecting the general phasing out of BTEC First awards and their replacement by Intermediate GNVQs.

17% of 1994 entry students took GCSEs more than 15 months before the start of their Advanced course. Among this group, 66% of respondents had been studying in 1994. The rest - 6% of the whole sample, and the only ones not entering from other full-time study - had mainly been working or unemployed. The most popular courses for this group to have been studying before their Advanced course were GNVQs (18% of group), A Levels (13%) and BTEC Firsts (12%).

One of the very few differences to be found between the two cohorts relates to the GCSEs of the 'most deferred' entries - i.e. those who had taken GCSE more than 15 months before beginning their Advanced GNVQ. In the first cohort, this group's performance was significantly higher than that of the one-year deferrals (though still lower than for direct entry students). In the second cohort, as can be seen in table C.3, there was no such difference. This probably reflects the increasing clarity with which GNVQs' 'niche' is perceived by prospective students.

C3 ADVANCED GNVQS AND STUDENTS' PROGRAMMES OF STUDY

One of the most distinctive features of British education is the way in which students can mix and match qualifications, rather than doing a course which may include many subjects but leads to a single diploma. Although it is not only possible but quite common to take an Advanced GNVQ on its own, a large proportion of students combine theirs with either another complete qualification or with additional and separately certificated units. Table C.4 summarises this pattern.

Number of additional qualifications combined with a GNVQ	% of students
0	29.8
1	44.0
2	18.2
3	6.0
4	1.3
5	0.7

Table C.4. Advanced students' programmes of study

Additional GNVQ units are slightly more likely than GCSE resits to be taken *during* an Advanced GNVQ. However when previous resits by Advanced students who entered via Intermediate are included in the totals, GCSE resits emerge as the most popular qualification to be combined with any Advanced GNVQ. A substantial number of students also combine an Advanced GNVQ with an A Level; a few take some other qualification. **Almost none combines an Advanced GNVQ with an NVQ or with any NVQ units.**

GCSE RE-TAKES

Complete programmes devoted to GCSE resits have become much less common in recent years (see Spours *op cit*). However, Maths and English GCSE have a special status. C grades in both are generally seen as necessary for higher education, and are also required by many institutions for entry into full (3 subject) A Level programmes. They are correspondingly important in the programmes of GNVQ students, many of whom did not attain Cs in these subjects at the end of Key Stage 4.

Because of both the importance of Maths and English and the continuing discussion and controversy over the value of re-sitting GCSEs, the experiences and success rates of the GNVQ student sample are discussed in Appendix V. The main findings are summarised here.

MATHEMATICS

In the first year of their Advanced course, 17% of 'direct entry' respondents (who had only just sat their main GCSEs) reported that they planned to re-take Maths GCSE. We did not ask them to specify whether it would be that year or later; but the usual practice in schools and colleges is for re-sits to be after one year (in this case, summer of 1995).

As the table below shows, retake plans were associated with previous results. Those with very poor GCSEs were less likely to attempt Maths again; while the top group included many who already had a C in Mathematics.

	<3 GCSEs A-D	3 GCSEs A-D	4 GCSEs A-D	5+GCSEs A-D	All
% retaking Maths	5.5	23.1	30.3	16.6	17.0

Table C.5. Direct entry Advanced students' retake intentions (Year 1)

Among 'deferred entry' students, retakes are even more common. 28% had retaken Mathematics already. However, if, on a second attempt, a student still does not get a C, a third attempt is unlikely. For the whole second cohort Advanced sample, we find only 2.8% resitting a second time and 0.6% a third.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	U
'Deferred Entry' maths resits (summer 1994)	0.7%	5.7%	30.5%	36.5%	19.4%	5.0%	2.2%
Direct entry maths resits (summer 1995)	-	2.7%	40.9%	34.5%	16.5%	2.7%	2.7%
Direct entry maths resits (summer 1996)	-	2.9%	48.5%	33.8%	8.8%	2.9%	2.9%

Table C.6. Maths GCSE resits: reported grades on first attempted resit

Table C.6 summarises resit results, and compares the (1994) grades obtained by the academically weaker 'deferred entry' students with those reported (for summer 1995) by 'direct entry' students retaking at the end of their first year and with those obtained in summer 1996 at the end of the Advanced course. Among the summer 1995 group 44% obtained a C or above - not a majority but not a forlorn hope either. A majority of the second year group (51.4%) did the same. (The much smaller group from the first cohort for whom retake results are available registered a 55% 'success' rate.) Those with stronger academic credentials tended to do better on resits within as well as between these groups. For example, students also taking an A Level - who have higher average GCSE points - also get significantly better resit grades.

The conventional wisdom is that GCSE retakes are a waste of time. It is true that one-year programmes devoted entirely to retakes left some or most students with little to show for it (FEFC 1997 *op cit*); but these programmes are in any case vanishing. In the case of Maths resits, our data show a more complex picture. They certainly do not suggest that students are irrational in pursuing a GCSE C grade via resits: many will achieve it. However those with very low grades are most unlikely to, and not many have the stamina for a third or fourth attempt at the same qualification.

ENGLISH

English language resits are significantly less common than Maths among Advanced GNVQ students. Overall, 10% (n = 102) of the deferred entry group had resat the previous year; and 8.5% of the direct entry stated, in the first year, that they planned a retake. Together, these indicate a 9% overall resit rate in English Language for Advanced students.

Of the 230 cases for whom English Language retake grades are available, 53% registered an improvement on their retake. Forty-one percent remained the same. Sixty-eight percent of this group consisted of students who had originally obtained a D in GCSE English Language, and 17% had originally obtained an E. Seventy percent of those with an E had registered an improvement, however. Overall, 57% of respondents achieved a C or better on their retake: results which would certainly appear to make retakes worthwhile.

There was a smaller number of respondents retaking English Literature. Of the 102 who were, 50% registered an improvement, and 44% registered no change. Sixty percent of the group originally had a D in GCSE English Literature, and 20% originally had an E. Overall, 59% of respondents achieved a C or better on their retake.

As with Maths, English resit plans were closely associated with previous grades. Table C.7 summarises the relationship.

	% with a given grade in GCSE English Lang. who are resitting English	% with a given grade in GCSE English Lit. who are resitting English	% with a given grade in GCSE Maths who areresitting Maths
U	-	-	-
G	-	-	25.0
F	60.0	50.0	36.1
E	33.3	25.9	31.4
D	36.8	18.0	42.7
C	0.2	4.7	0.5
B	-	1.1	0.7

Table C.7. English and Maths GCSE retakes: take-up by GCSE results for 'direct entry' Advanced students

ADDITIONAL UNITS

In the first years of GNVQ additional units were, inevitably, fairly unusual parts of student programmes. The awarding bodies made them available gradually; and the work involved in offering an entirely new qualification meant that most institutions concentrated on the compulsory units. Among Advanced students in the 1993-5 cohort almost none reported additional units in the first year of their studies. The Advanced students for the 1994-6 cohort were much more likely to be taking Additional units. In the first year of their programme 27% reported taking some units, although the figure was decidedly lower (9%) for those in sixth form colleges. In the second year, 31.6% of respondents reported that additional units were part of their programme.

	Number of units (% taking)							
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Whole sample	**68.4**	**8.0**	**6.5**	**7.2**	**3.9**	**2.5**	**3.4**	**0.2**
Business	65.8	6.3	6.0	10.1	4.6	2.9	4.0	0.3
Health & Social Care	75.8	8.9	8.9	5.6	0.8	-	-	-
Leisure & Tourism	62.8	9.6	9.2	6.9	4.1	3.2	3.7	0.5
Art & Design	68.7	8.6	2.5	5.5	3.7	4.9	6.1	-
Science	70.0	6.7	6.7	3.3	10.0	-	3.3	-

Table C.8. Number of additional units taken by second year Advanced students: total sample and selected GNVQs

Relationship between GNVQ and number of units taken significant at p<0.05 level

Table C.8 summarises take-up of additional units as reported by students in the second year of their course. It provides detailed breakdowns only for those five GNVQs with sizeable numbers of respondents. There is some relationship between GNVQ and number of units taken; but it is not a simple one. Leisure & Tourism students, for example, are the most likely to take some units - but not particularly likely to take large numbers. Health & Social Care courses are the least likely to include additional units.

VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The White Paper which launched GNVQs specified that they should 'be clearly related to the occupationally specific NVQs...' and described them as providing a preparation for employment as well as for further study. If its authors thereby envisaged the incorporation of NVQs or NVQ units into GNVQ students' programmes, this has signally failed to happen.

In previous reports we have noted that **GNVQs and NVQs are almost never taken together, and are viewed by institutions and students alike as designed for completely separate populations**. The current survey came in advance of any large-scale implementation of New Apprenticeships. The latter may alter the picture somewhat (though largely in the sense of adding GNVQ units to apprentices' programmes (Huddleston & Unwin 1997). For the moment, it remains quite unchanged.

In their first-year responses, only 6.6% of Advanced students reported that they expected to combine some sort of vocational qualification with their GNVQ. At this point, many were unsure of its exact nature (NVQ/other); but there were marked differences between subjects. 42% of Hospitality and Catering and 12% of Leisure & Tourism expected to do this, significantly above the 6.6% average for the group.

Table C.9 summarises actual uptake of other vocational qualifications by second-year Advanced respondents. NVQ uptake is extremely low (3% on average), the only exception being the 'other' category which groups together some of the smaller GNVQs. In fact, the figure here reflects its domination by Hospitality & Catering students, 27% of whom report taking an NVQ: considerably lower than expected by first year students on this award but much higher than for any other GNVQ on which we have useable data.[2] Other vocational qualifications (e.g. CLAIT, Pitmans) are almost twice as popular as NVQs, though here too uptake is very much a minority exercise.

[2] Construction & Built Environment students might be expected to take NVQ units relatively often, but we have no data to support this proposition

GNVQ	NVQ	Others (eg CLAIT, Pitman)	None	N =
Total	**3.4**	**6.5**	**90.1**	**1004**
Business	2.9	4.9	92.2	348
Health & Social Care	0.8	7.3	91.9	124
Leisure & Tourism	3.7	9.2	87.2	218
Art & Design	0.6	6.7	92.6	162
Science	0.0	5.0	95.0	60
Others	16.8	3.9	76.6	77

Table C.9. Other vocational qualifications taken (% taking)

Relationship between take-up and GNVQ area significant at p<.0001 level

A LEVELS

It is less common for students to combine an A Level with their GNVQ than to re-take Maths and/or English GCSE: but A Levels are considerably more common than are other vocational qualifications. 17.9% of students responding during the first year of their studies, and 15.1% of those responding during the second year were combining their advanced GNVQ with one or (much more rarely) two A Levels. The average GCSE point score of Advanced GNVQ students also taking an A Level is 36.1, compared with an average of 32.7 for those not taking an A Level.

Table C.10 below gives national (weighted) estimates for A Level take-up by institutional type, based on 1st year responses. It suggests that A Level combinations are much more common in schools; but unfortunately our second year data has too few school-based students to confirm whether this remains the case into the second year.

	FE colleges	6th form colleges	Schools
% taking no A Levels	86.8	68.9	56.0
% taking 1 A Level	12.6	29.1	34.9
% taking 2 A Levels	0.6	1.7	9.0

Table C.10. GCE A Level/GNVQ combinations for first year Advanced students, by centre type (weighted)

The likelihood of combining GNVQ and A Levels is strongly related to the subject studied (p < .0001). Table C.11 summarises A Level uptake for the overall samples and for those GNVQs where we had sample sizes of over 40. The different patterns found in the first and second year responses are difficult to interpret. They may reflect significant differences between subjects in 'drop-out' from A Level, but may simply be an artefact of different response rates at the two periods.

	First year responses (Winter 1994-5)		Second year responses (Spring 1996)	
	% taking A Level	N	% taking A Level	N
Overall sample	**17.9**	**2229**	**15.1**	**1004**
Art & Design	29.0	217	11.0	163
Business	15.7	835	15.2	348
Constr. & Built Env.	2.2	46	(Numbers below 40)	
Health & Social Care	21.1	356	28.2	124
Hospitality & Catering	15.2	66	10.4	48
Leisure & Tourism	13.9	482	10.1	218
Science	17.6	142	8.3	60

Table C.11. A Level uptake of Advanced GNVQ students: unweighted sample responses

As was the case in 1993-4, among first years, Art and Design students are most likely to be taking a GCE A Level as well. Again as in 1993/4, these are most likely to be in a related area such as Art, Photography or Graphics: 76% of Art & Design students who were taking an A Level in addition to their GNVQ were taking one in a related area. However, our data show a sharp drop-off by Year 2.

An interesting new phenomenon in this cohort is the relatively high number of Advanced Health & Social Care students also doing an A Level. This is not entirely to be explained by the relative popularity of Health & Social Care in schools, as 18% of Advanced Health & Social Care students in FE colleges are taking an A Level in addition (higher than the average for Advanced students in FE colleges), whereas the proportions for sixth form colleges and schools are 29% and 35% respectively (the same as the overall averages). It is also not the case that nearly all these students were doing an A Level in a related area: only 53% were doing a related A Level.

	A Level candidates	Non-A Level candidates
Maths	20	34
English	8	11

Table C.12. Percentage of Advanced GNVQ students retaking Maths or English GCSE at some point post-Key Stage 4

The higher average point scores of A Level candidates subsume better results in Maths, English and Science. They are less likely to retake GCSEs, or to take additional GNVQ units, as shown in table C.13.

	%	
	No A Level	**A Level**
Additional units	35.6	9.2
No additional units	64.4	90.8

Table C.13. Additional unit uptake by A-Level and non A-Level candidates (second year)

However, among those students who are taking additional units the number taken does not differ significantly from the number taken by non-A Level students. The average is 3.15 for non-A Level students who report additional units, and 2.87 for A Level students reporting them; and this falls well short of normal significance levels.[3]

A LEVEL RESULTS

A Level results are reported by 13.5% (n = 108) of those who responded to the third 1996/7 sweep of this cohort. This is below the 15.1% who reported A Level plans in their second year; and the 17.9% with such plans during year 1 of their course.

Tables C.14 and C.15 summarise the success rate of this group.

	%
2 passes	5.6
1 pass	69.5
1 U grade	22.2
2 U grades	2.7

Table C.14. A Level results of 1994-6 GNVQ students taking one or more A Levels: Percentages (n = 108)

	%
A	4
B	10
C	19
D	23
E	17
F	2
U	25

Table C.15. A Level grade distribution of 1994-6 Advanced GNVQ students

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[3] F value = 1.36/ 2-tail prob .343

Nationally, among 17/18 year old candidates, 17% of A Levels were ungraded; 20% received an A grade, and 64% received A-C compared to 4% and 33% for our respondents.

C4 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERMEDIATE GNVQ STUDENTS

The Intermediate GNVQ, like other GNVQs, can in principle be taken over any length of time. In practice, it is delivered almost universally as a one-year course. Our main period of data collection (1993-6) encompasses three whole cohorts for the Intermediate GNVQ. We obtained cross-sector data for 1993-4 and 1994-5; and an additional sample of school-based students in 1995-6.

The first cohort to be surveyed took their Intermediate GNVQ in the academic year 1993-4. As explained above, students were sampled within institutions; and at that point, the sample was representative of the national GNVQ population. 506 Intermediate responses were obtained. The second, larger cohort involved students starting GNVQs in autumn 1994. 1,345 valid responses were received from Intermediate students. However, by this point the huge increase in schools registering as centres had made our sample less than fully representative. As explained above, we estimate that over 40% of Intermediate students were in schools by 1995 - in our sample, their numbers were far lower. Moreover, our analyses indicated some significant differences between school and FE/sixth form college respondents. In order to check that these differences were genuine, and not a sampling artefact, we carried out a supplementary survey of school-based students in the 1995-6 cohort, and received 430 valid replies. In general, they indicated that our school sample of the year before was representative of the school population (and so could be weighted accordingly). Where differences exist, they are discussed in the text.

As noted in section A above, GNVQ Intermediate enrolments are overwhelmingly concentrated in the four 'main' subject areas; and this is even more true of schools than of the college sector. Although overall these subjects' share of registrations has fallen to 75% (1996-7), we estimate that among schools it remains close to 90%.

Our sample reflects the national picture closely except that, as usual, Science was oversampled to obtain a sizeable number of responses. Figure C.4 shows the gender and subject breakdown of the complete 1994-6 Intermediate sample.

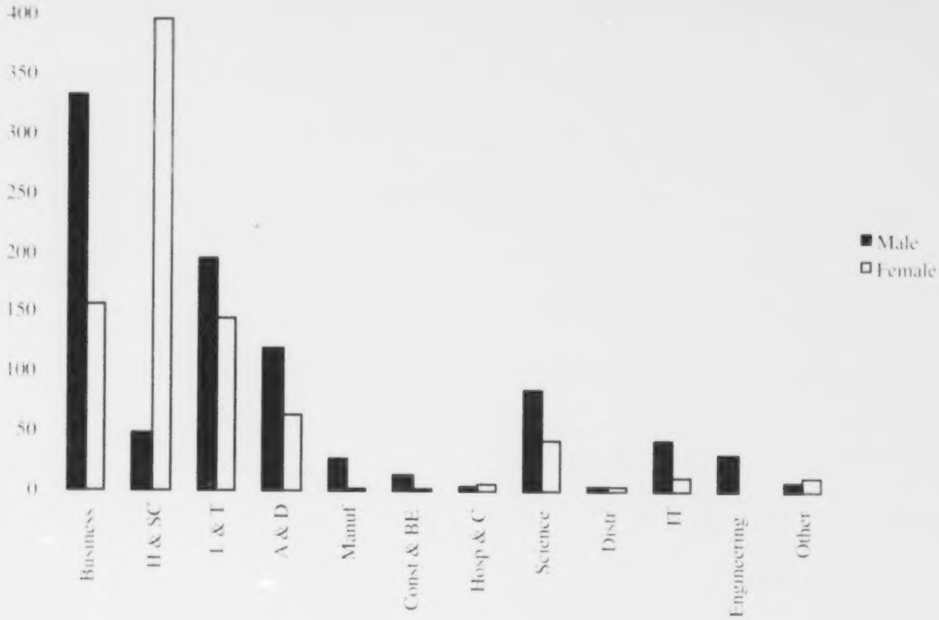

Figure C.4. Subject and gender breakdown of the complete 1994-6 Intermediate sample

Intermediate GNVQ is an overwhelmingly full-time course of study. 98% of students describe themselves as full-time, with no significant differences between sectors. They are also young: three-quarters are 16 at the start of the academic year (i.e. enter from Key Stage 4) and over 95% are 19 or under. Most Intermediate students start their courses directly after GCSEs: this was true for 81% in 1994. Another 13% report 'studying' last year. (The nature of the responses suggests that some of these may in fact also have been working on GCSEs.) Only 6% have entered from youth training, work, or unemployment.

The GCSE profile of the sample was very similar to that of the smaller sample surveyed the previous year, and, as one would predict, quite distinct from the Advanced GNVQ profile. The slight deterioration between 1993 and 1994 in GCSE passes (i.e. those of the autumn 1993 and autumn 1994 Intermediate entries) is not in itself statistically significant. However, the overall national picture for GCSE results in these two years is one of rising average grades/point scores. It would appear, therefore, that Intermediate students may be coming from a slightly lower centile range of the 16 year old cohort than in the previous year.

Number of GCSE awards at C or above	1993 entry (n = 505)		1994 entry (n = 1345)	
	%	Cumulative %	%	Cumulative %
0	33	33	36	36
1	28	61	28	64
2	18	79	18	82
3	12	91	12	94
4	4	95	3	97
5	3	98	1	98
6	1	99	1	99
7+	1	100	1	100

Table C.16. Percentage of Intermediate students gaining GCSEs at C and above

In both years the average number of GCSE grades A-C was similar for schools, FE and sixth form colleges (see figures C.5 and C.6). The average number of grades A-D varied more. It was lower for FE colleges in 1993, but higher for FE colleges in 1994-5. We do not, therefore, detect any stable or significant differences in the academic profile of GNVQ Intermediate students between sectors. The previous section concluded that there were also no such differences at Advanced level.

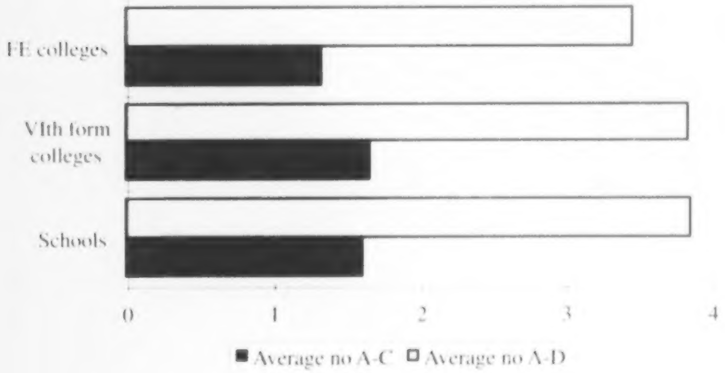

Figure C.5. Average number of GCSEs grades A-C and A-D achieved by Intermediate students, by centre type: 1993-4 cohort

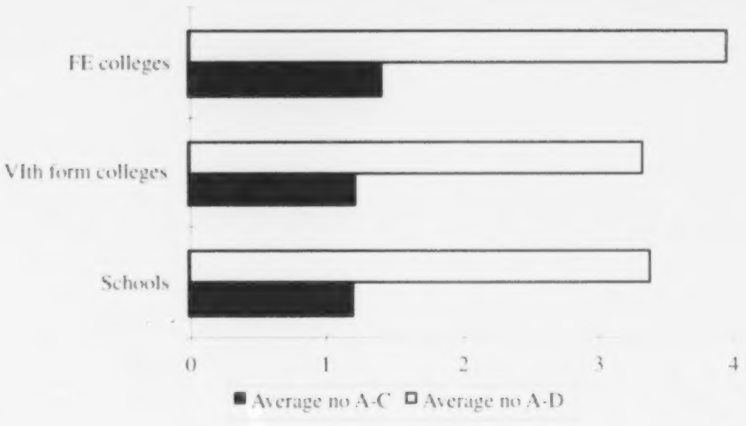

Figure C.6. Average numbers of GCSEs grades A-C and A-D achieved by Intermediate GNVQ students, by centre type: 1994-95 cohort

ADDITIONAL SUBJECTS

As with Advanced GNVQs, it is quite common for Intermediate students to combine their GNVQ with other qualifications. A Levels are not normally combined with Intermediate GNVQs. In 1993, 3.5% (n = 18) reported taking either 1 or 2 A Levels. In 1994, 2.2% reported taking an A Level (or in one case, 2) alongside their Intermediate GNVQ, with no significant differences by sector.

In 1993-4 only 4% of Intermediate students reported taking additional NVQ units. In 1994-5, 5.5% reported some sort of specific vocational qualification (NVQ unit/NVQ/ other). This rises to 8.4% for Leisure & Tourism. Additional GNVQ units, however, which were not reported by Intermediate students at all in 1993-4, were reported by 11% in 1994-5.

By far the most common form of additional study is a GCSE resit. This was true for the 1993-4 Intermediate cohort: it was equally true for 1994-5. The popularity of resits with this group reflects their relatively low grades, and also the importance of English and Maths results in both the labour market and for further study. It is also an area in which **take-up has been increasing during the course of this study.**

Tables C.17 and C.18 below indicate the proportions of Intermediate students combining a Maths or English GCSE resit with their GNVQ. In Maths, a huge gap in take-up between colleges and schools is narrowing (and anecdotal evidence suggests that demand has continued to grow fast in the college sector). In English, the most recent figures from our supplementary school survey suggest that we may be about to experience a significant increase in resits here too.

	1993-4	1994-5	1995-6
National (weighted estimate)	26	37	n/a
College-based	10*	26	n/a
School-based	44	49	47

Table C.17. Percentage of Intermediate GNVQ students resitting Maths GCSE

** significantly higher for the small 6th form college group*

	1993-4	1994-5	1995-6
National (weighted estimate)	27	27	n/a
College-based	24	27	n/a
School-based	30	28	40

Table C.18. Percentage of Intermediate GNVQ students resitting English GCSE

These trends come at a time when, as discussed in Parts B and E, full-time GCSE resit courses are in decline. In the FE sector, for example, numbers of GCSE entries by 16-19 olds fell 18% between 1994 and 1995. The Inspectorate shares the generally negative view of GCSE resits: a recent report notes that 'Many students… are being guided on to GNVQ Foundation or Intermediate courses which are increasingly accepted as more appropriate and realistic options' (FEFC 1997: para 50). These figures indicate that students are only partially convinced. GNVQ core skills are not, it would seem, regarded as a substitute for Maths or English GCSE: on the contrary, the GCSEs are seen as increasingly, not decreasingly vital.

The gap between school and college provision is somewhat puzzling. Since there is no funding barrier to college provision, it may reflect the attitudes to GCSE resits articulated by the Inspectorate. Alternatively, it may be that schools wish to 'fill' students' timetables in a way that colleges do not; and so push students to take GCSEs during their GNVQ year.

RESIT RESULTS

The results from our follow-ups of GNVQ students are somewhat difficult to interpret because follow-up respondents tend to be representative of the student intake in many respects, but *not* with respect to whether they completed their GNVQ. For example, in our first, smaller student sample (1993-4 Intermediate students), students who provided follow-up data were representative of the larger group in terms of original GCSE point scores, whether or not they were resitting Maths and English GCSE, and their type of institution - but almost all (90%) had achieved their GNVQ at a time when the national figure was about 50%.

On the second, larger sweep, exactly the same pattern has emerged. The response rate has been almost identical. Of the first sweep Intermediate students (1993-4), 38% responded to a second follow-up questionnaire. Of the second larger sweep of (1994-5) Intermediate students, 39% did. Once again, they are unrepresentative in one respect, but a key one: 88% compared to 40% nationally, completed their Intermediate GNVQ.

Among our respondents, English retakes by both Intermediate and Advanced students are most likely to be reported by students whose original grade was D. Maths retakes, however, involve large numbers whose original grade was an E or even an F. While the latter can rarely be hoping for a C, they presumably feel that a D would be worth having.

In the first cohort, the percentage of follow-up Intermediate students reporting GCSE resit grade was very slightly (and non-significantly) lower than the percentage who had stated that they planned to resit. 46% had improved their grade in Maths, 52% got the same as before, and only one student actually did worse. 26% achieved the magic C grade. The more recent group of Intermediate respondents report similar success rates in this respect - 25% of resits achieved a C (as compared to about half the Advanced group who resat). (At national level this would translate into 6,000 Intermediate GNVQ students achieving a C in Maths.) However, the other results of the 1994 cohort are slightly worse (see table C.19). The small size of the first follow-up cohort makes it impossible to gauge whether the difference is significant.

In English, 48% of the 1993-4 follow-up students had improved their grades; 7% did worse, and the rest the same as before. Overall grade patterns showed a slight improvement - 52% getting C or over in 1994-5 compared to 41% in 1993-4 (see table C.19). Again the small size of the earlier sample makes it unclear whether there has been any significant improvement nationally in Intermediate students' success rate.

	1993-4 (n = 50)	**1994-5 (n = 114)**
C+	26	25
D	46	34
E	18	26
F	10	11
G	-	3

Table C.19. (a) Maths resit grades of GNVQ Intermediate students

	1993-4 (n = 42)	1994-5 (n = 120)
B+	10	10
C	31	42
D	45	39
E	12	6
F	2	3
G	-	-

(b) English resit grades of GNVQ Intermediate students

D Plans and aspirations

D1 INTRODUCTION

The plans and aspirations of GNVQ students make it clear that, while the qualification was intended to be clearly vocational as well as educational, its 'customers' regard it as primarily and crucially the latter.

As discussed further below (Part E), the introduction of GNVQs has coincided with a rapid increase in post-16 participation rates. The way in which GNVQs have developed must be seen in this context and not merely as a function of the awards' own design. Nonetheless, the decision to allow schools to offer GNVQs widely, and the absence of compulsory or assessed work placements, strengthen the 'educational' image. Especially at Intermediate level, the typical experience of a GNVQ student for most of the year is of a rather cosy, largely classroom-based programme, built around project work where material supplied by the teachers (many with no vocational background) is supplemented by library visits, information gathering and field trips (University of Bristol and Institute of Education, 1995). Some GNVQs, of course, will differ. However this typical scenario is not experienced as a problem by most students (or staff), because the vocational aspects of the programme, and the scale and quality of work placements, are tangential to the awards' main purpose: to provide access to the next level of education or training.

D2 INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS' PLANS

Table D.1 records the plans of both surveyed cohorts of **Intermediate** students (those of 1993-4 and 1994-5).

	1994	1995
Advanced GNVQ	46%	59%
NVQ	4%	2%
Other full-time course	23%	16%
Work	19%	19%
Other	8%	4%

Table D.1. Intermediate students: expected destinations a year hence (as expressed in the spring of their Intermediate course): Percentages

In other words, the dominant aspiration of Intermediate students is further study; nor is there any significant difference here between students in the school and college sectors. (The supplementary survey of school-based Intermediate students found exactly the same pattern as reported here.) However, there are some differences between subject groups, as shown in table D.2 for the second cohort. Art & Design students are the most likely to plan a further study (as was the case the year before). Health & Social Care students are least attracted by an Advanced GNVQ, and most by other courses[4] (something which was not evident in the previous year's smaller cohort).

	Business	Health & Social Care	Leisure & Tourism	Art & Design	Science
Advanced GNVQ (%)	65.3	38.8	68.8	72.8	64.8
Other FT college course (%)	8.2	29.7	6.7	16.3	14.3
NVQ (%)	1.8	4.4	0.5	2.0	1.9
Work (%)	21.1	23.4	21.6	6.8	12.4
Other (%)	3.6	3.8	2.4	2.0	6.7

Table D.2. Intermediate students: expected destinations in 1995-6 as described in spring 1995 (n = 1,345)

Note: only subjects with ≥ 40 responses are included.

Table D.3 illustrates how far **Intermediate students aspire not simply to Level 3 qualifications, but also to higher education and advanced training.** In spite of their generally poor GCSE results, 40% of the first cohort expected to be in higher education or advanced specialist training in three years' time. For the (larger) second cohort, this had risen further to 50%.[5]

	1994	1995
Higher education	29	39
Specialist training	11	11
Full-time work	60	47
Other	-	3

Table D.3. Plans for three years' time: Intermediate students (%)

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[4] This 'other' category includes A Levels, BTEC Diplomas, and college-based non-NVQ vocational awards, including the NNEB's.

[5] Among school-based Intermediate students in 1995-6, the comparable figure was 44%.

Again, there are major differences between subjects in Intermediate students' aspirations. The Health & Social Care pattern reflects the role of this programme as a route into health-related occupations; while Art & Design and Science have students with particularly strong aspirations to higher education. In this case, inter-subject differences are very close to those found the previous year (FEU et al, 1994).

	Business	Health & Social care	Leisure & Tourism	Art & Design	Science	Total
Specialist training programme (%)	4.8	24.9	3.3	9.3	10.7	11.3
HE (%)	41.4	22.5	28.5	58.9	62.5	38.9
FT work	49.7	51.2	65.4	28.5	24.1	47.2
Other	4.2	1.5	2.8	3.3	2.7	2.7

Table D.4. Plans for three years' time: Intermediate students, summer 1995

D3 ADVANCED STUDENTS' PLANS

Tables D.5 to D.9 provide comparable information for **Advanced** GNVQ students. For these students, too, the prime objective is further study. However, since theirs is a two year course, the relevant future points are (i) three years on from the first year of their GNVQ (i.e. two years after completion); (ii) one year on from their second year; and (iii) three years on from their second year.

As table D.5 shows, general aspirations are stable, and also consistent across sectors. Almost two thirds of Advanced students plan to proceed to further full-time education or training.

	1994	1995
Higher education	53	50
Specialist training	6	9
Total training + HE	**59**	**59**
Full-time work	41	39
Other	-	2

Table D.5. Plans for three years' time: Advanced students, first year of course

There are no differences between sectors: patterns are the same for FE, sixth form colleges and schools. There are, however, differences between GNVQs (see table D.6).

	Bus	Health & Scl Cr	Leis & Trsm	Art & Dsgn	Constr & BE	Hosp & Catering	Sci
Specialist training programme (%)	3.0	33.1	3.8	6.0	8.9	9.2	6.6
HE (%)	51.6	41.8	38.9	71.1	62.2	40.0	68.6
Total Training + HE	**54.6**	**74.9**	**42.7**	**77.1**	**71.1**	**49.2**	**75.2**
FT work	42.8	21.9	54.1	21.9	28.9	50.8	22.6
Other	2.6	0.3	3.0	0.9	0	0	2.2

Table D.6. Plans for three years' time: Advanced students, first year of course

Respondents were asked the same questions about future plans towards the end of their course (i.e. a year later). The overall picture had remained largely unchanged. Table D.7 shows second-year students' plans for a year hence (i.e. immediately after completing their GNVQ). The proportion wishing to continue with higher education or specialised training is slightly, though not significantly higher, than a year before. The differences between subjects are also much as before. The relationship between GNVQ subject and plans for the future is statistically significant at the .001 level. As with Intermediate students, the high proportion planning specialist training among Health & Social Care students reflects its popularity as a precursor to nursing and related training. The higher proportion of Leisure & Tourism students planning to enter full-time employment rather than continue studying exactly mirrors the results of our previous cohort's responses. The only difference between year 1 and year 2 results is among the Science students, where the proportion planning further studies has risen considerably; so that rather than being equivalent to Health & Social Care and to Art & Design in numbers planning further study, they are now the clear leaders in this respect.

	Bus	Health & SC	Leis & T	Art & D	Hosp & C	Sci	Others Combined n = 28	Total n = 1004
Specialist training programme	4.2	24.2	2.5	11.1	16.3	8.8	10.7	8.5
Higher education	55.7	44.2	45.1	60.8	41.9	75.4	57.1	53.3
Subtotal: Training or HE	**59.9**	**68.4**	**47.6**	**71.9**	**58.2**	**84.2**	**67.8**	**61.8**
Full-time work	34.5	20.0	44.1	19.6	39.5	10.5	25.0	30.8
Other	5.6	11.6	8.3	8.5	2.3	5.3	7.2	7.3

Table D.7. Plans in a year's time (Spring of Second Year): Percentages by Advanced GNVQ course

Second year students were also asked what they expected to be doing in three years' time. As table D.8 shows, the numbers expecting to be in higher education or specialist training in *three* years' time are considerably lower than those who expect to be in HE or training a *year* hence. The difference is greatest for Hospitality & Catering and Science; lowest for Business. This change suggests that many of those planning to enter higher education or training are thinking in terms of a two-year diploma or qualification (e.g. an HND) rather than a three or four year degree.

	Bus	Health & SC	Leis & T	Art & D	Hosp & C	Sci	Others Combined n = 28	Total n = 1004
Higher education and Specialist training	41.7	45.2	27.9	45.4	28.3	54.4	41.4	40.4

Table D.8. Plans in 3 years' time (Spring of Second Year): Percentages by Advanced GNVQ course

There is a strong relationship between future plans and the 'academic' loading of students' courses as measured by whether or not they are taking an A Level. Students combining an A Level with their GNVQ are more likely both to plan further study; and to plan on a three-year (degree level) rather than a two-year qualification.

	HE	Sp. Tr.	FT Emp.	Other	N
Taking an A Level	63.3	10.7	16.7	9.3	150
Not taking an A Level	51.5	8.1	33.3	7.1	804

Table D.9. (a) Plans for next year: 2nd year Advanced students (%)

Difference highly significant: p <.001

	HE	Sp. Tr.	FT Emp.	Other	N
Taking an A Level	47.9	9.6	30.4	4.1	146
Not taking an A Level	33.1	5.0	59.1	2.9	804

(b) Plans for 3 years hence: 2nd year Advanced students (%)

Difference highly significant: p <.0002

THE PROGRESS OF THEIR STUDIES

In discussing the delivery of GNVQs at centre level (section A above) we noted the highly variable rate of progress reported by Advanced GNVQ students - between centres, but also within. Because of the high rates of non-completion for GNVQs, students' responses were analysed in detail to see whether any other characteristics could be related to their progress.

Students' progress (with portfolios, tests, and overall) turns out to be related both to the GNVQ they are doing and to whether they are also doing an A Level. As noted earlier, A Level students are likely to have rather higher GCSE grades (and less likely to be doing GCSE resits or additional units.) However, the difference in GCSE points is not enormous; conversely, come the summer term, A Level students are likely to be devoting much of their time to their exams, and probably 'should' be further ahead with their portfolios than students following a GNVQ programme alone.

Table D.10 summarises progress rates for the individual GNVQs with sizeable numbers of respondents. Differences between GNVQ appear highly significant (p<.0001); and comparisons of mean (average) completion rates confirm the picture which these percentages indicate. A considerable majority of Business students are above the overall average on the progress measure, while Hospitality students generally are making very slow progress. Leisure & Tourism students also have considerably more students at 'below average' completion levels than would be expected from the overall sample. Table D.11 provides comparable figures for A and non-A Level students; and shows that average progress for the former is greater. Again the difference is highly significant. However, it is also true that, in both cases, there are high levels of overlap.

	% reporting completion of			
	0-5	**6-10**	**11-16**	**N**
Business	13.2	43.1	43.7	348
Health & Social Care	25.8	40.3	33.9	124
Leisure & Tourism	18.8	50.5	30.7	218
Art & Design	20.9	47.2	31.9	163
Hospitality & Catering	27.1	60.4	12.5	48
Science	26.7	38.3	35.0	60

Table D.10. Progress towards award completion by Advanced GNVQ

('Progress' = sum of portfolios and tests completed): winter 1995-6

	0-5	6-10	11-16	N
A Level	12.5	48.8	38.7	
No A Level	20.8	45.7	33.5	852

Table D.11. Progress towards award completion by A Level uptake

As noted above, whether or not a student does an A Level is itself associated with their choice of GNVQ; so the two effects are not likely to wholly independent of each other. An analysis of variance indicated how far progress rates are associated with GNVQ choice, A Level, or both; and also how much of an influence these factors have. In the case of test completion, both A Level and GNVQ have a significant and separate effect, but in the case of portfolio completion only GNVQ is clearly important: - A Level adds very little to the proportion of variance explained. While overall, both GNVQ and A Level uptake are statistically significant variables in explaining progression rates, it is important to note that they only explain a small amount (5%) of the differences between students.

We also wondered whether students' future plans would have an effect on the speed with which they progressed. Were students planning to enter HE likely to progress faster than those who were unsure of their future plans, or mostly concerned to get a job as soon as possible? Table D.12 summarises differences; while the analysis of variance confirmed that plans did have an impact on rates, over and above GNVQ and A Level, but that, though statistically significant, it was not large in terms of variance explained.

	Completion ('Progress') Score			
Plans for next year	0-5	6-10	11-16	N
HE or specialist training	15.3	47.5	37.3	590
Full-time employment	19.1	45.7	35.2	293
Other/don't know	36.6	43.7	19.7	71

Table D.12. Advanced students' progress by future plans

The final factor examined was (self) predicted grade. Although overall grades for a GNVQ cannot be given until the course is fully completed, a consistent finding of earlier studies - our own and others' - is that students are very anxious to know how they are progressing. It has therefore become common practice to give 'provisional' grades for units. These enable students to get a general idea of their likely final grade.

Our questionnaires asked students to predict the grades they would receive. Predicted grade is significantly correlated with a student's progress on portfolio completion, test success, and overall progress (on the two combined). The relevant correlation coefficients are, respectively, 0.18, 0.17, and 0.2. These are all significant ($p < .01$), but do not indicate a very strong relation between predicted grade and progress towards completion - or, indeed, vice versa.

Overall, Advanced students' study programmes and plans account for less than 10% of the variance in their rate of completion (with another 7% ascribable to the centre at which they are studying). However, **future plans are very strongly related to predicted grades**.

As table D.13 shows, those planning to go into higher education are far less likely than other groups to predict only a pass for themselves; conversely, those planning to enter full-time employment are least likely to predict a distinction. Obviously we cannot tell which way the causality runs (if either): that is, whether plans for HE entry are made, or abandoned, on the basis of predicted grades, or whether plans determine how hard the students work. However, it is clear that students do change their minds during their courses. In the first cohort studied (who were surveyed in years 1 and 2 of the 1993-5 Advanced course), 12% changed their minds in one direction - saying in year 1 that they expected to be in HE and in year 2 that they did not: and another 12% did the opposite. They originally did not plan on HE but by year 2 were planning to enter.

	Pass	Merit	Distinction	Don't know	N
Specialised training	25	36.8	9.2	28.9	76
Higher education	10.7	44.5	13.5	31.2	503
Full-time employment	25.6	37.4	6.4	30.6	281
Other	28.2	33.8	8.5	29.6	71
All (valid sample)	17.7	40.9	10.6	30.7	931

Table D.13. Predicted grades and future plans (for a year's time) of second year Advanced students

Relationship highly significant (p <.0001)

Because future plans are themselves related to a student's choice of GNVQ, we looked at the relationship of future plans, GNVQ and A Level together to self-predicted grade. The analysis confirmed that GNVQ and future plans have separate, independent effects, each explaining about 6% of the variance.[6]

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[6] In an analysis of variance, for A Level F value = 5.270, sig. .022; GNVQ F value 5.660, sig .000; future plans 12.847 & .000

D4 PATTERNS OF PROGRESSION: AFTER THE GNVQ

Information on students' experiences after GNVQ study is available for four separate groups of students: three Intermediate and one Advanced. As explained above, a single follow-up was carried out for the first (1993 registration) cohort of students surveyed. This covered the year after Intermediate, and the second year of Advanced courses. 38% of this Intermediate sample - 192 students - responded, and described their 1994-5 activities.

Attention was then shifted to the second cohort, all of whom received two follow-up questionnaires. For Intermediate students this covered the first and second years after their course. The response rate was 39% (n = 521) on the first and 27% (n = 368) on the second occasion (but representing different, though overlapping, sets of individuals). For Advanced students, the first follow-up fell into the second year of the course, and almost all those who responded were indeed still studying. The second follow-up, covering the next year's activities, had a response rate of 36% (n = 805).[7]

Finally, a follow-up questionnaire was also sent to the supplementary group of school-based Intermediate students surveyed in 1995-6. This provided another 125 respondents describing activities a year after their Intermediate GNVQ (with a response rate of 29%).

THE FOLLOW-UP SAMPLE

When the respondents to the follow-up surveys are compared with the original group, it turns out that in every case they are *representative* with respect to prior academic qualifications (GCSE profile) but *highly unrepresentative* with respect to their GNVQ performance.

The vast majority of respondents to our follow-up questionnaires had completed their GNVQs successfully. The same was not true nationally. Intermediate respondents were also significantly more likely to have obtained Merit or Distinction grades than was the national population. Table D.14 summarises these differences.

The descriptions which follow should therefore be seen as providing an accurate picture of the post-GNVQ activities of *successful* candidates. The follow-up response rates, the percentage of successful respondents, and the national completion rates imply, when taken together, that we have data on a very high proportion of those original respondents who completed - at least 80% of this group. However, the small number of non-completers who responded means that, even when analysed separately (completers/non-completers), it is unwise to generalise very broadly from the data on GNVQ 'drop-outs'.

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[7] The 'real' response rates were higher since by no means all the first or second follow-up questionnaires actually reached their addressees.

	Completion rate of respondents	**National completion rate**
Intermediate GNVQ 1993-4	90%	35%
Intermediate GNVQ 1994-5	88%	37%
Intermediate GNVQ 1995-6	80%	51%
Advanced GNVQs 1994-6	84%	As % of registrations: 42% As % of 2nd year: 58% (candidates taking ≥ 1 test)

Table D.14. Follow-up respondents compared to the national GNVQ population

(a) Completion rates

	Pass		**Merit**		**Distinction**	
	Sample	**National**	**Sample**	**National**	**Sample**	**National**
Int. 93-4	37	50	43	35	20	15
Int 94-5	39	52	45	35	16	12
Int 95-6	38	54	44	35	18	11
Adv 94-6	20	30	54	46	26	24

(b) GNVQ grades

THE ACTIVITIES OF INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

Because the number of follow-up respondents from the first cohort was small (192) this section focuses largely on the activities of students taking Intermediate GNVQs in 1994-5 and 1995-66. The second of these groups was entirely school-based, and surveyed in order to balance the growing over-weighting of FE in our main sample and check on the representativeness of its school-based component. There were, in fact, no significant differences between school-based Intermediate students in the main and the supplementary sample; and the results are therefore combined in the following tables.

Among 1993-4 Intermediate students, 75% were still studying the next year, and 45% were doing an Advanced GNVQ. Table D.15 provides a rather more detailed breakdown for the later cohorts of Intermediate students; although the proportions are broadly very similar.

	%
Employment	13
Unemployment	5
Employment + study	7
Advanced GNVQ	43
Advanced GNVQ + A Levels	3
A Levels (as a main course)	3
BTEC National Diploma	15
Other full-time courses (including NVQ, NNEB)	8
Unspecified	3

Table D.15. Activities of respondents the year after their Intermediate GNVQ course (n = 646. Category given is that listed as main activity by respondent)

Dividing the sample into **completers** and **non-completers** gives a clearer picture of future routes; and these data are shown in tables D.16 and D.17. As noted, the number of non-completers is small; 13% of respondents, or 85 individuals. 18 (21%) of the non-completers stated that they were still studying in order to complete their Intermediate GNVQ; but most of these were doing so in conjunction with another course which they had started - an Advanced GNVQ or BTEC Diploma. 8 students (9%) gave completion as their main activity. Only 4 students had submitted any portfolio work during the autumn term. However all but one had taken external tests. 8 had taken one test, 4 had taken 2 tests, and 4 had taken 3 tests, and one student reported taking 4 external tests.

	%
Advanced GNVQ	11
BTEC Diploma	2
A Levels	1
NVQ	20
Completing Intermediate GNVQ	9
Employment/unemployment	41
Other (including other courses)	16

Table D.16. Main activities of Intermediate 'non-completers' in the following year (n = 85)

Even among non-completers, around half still give study/training as their main activity. Among completers, as table D.17 makes clear, the large majority are studying. They are much less likely to give employment as their main activity, and also less than half as likely to be taking an NVQ.

	%
Advanced GNVQ	47
BTEC National Diploma	15
A Levels	3
NVQ	7
Other full-time courses	8
Employment/unemployment	16
Other/unspecified	4

Table D.17. Main activities of Intermediate 'completers' in the following year (n = 553)

As noted earlier 368 respondents also reported their activities two years after their Intermediate GNVQ in response to our second follow-up questionnaire; but of these only 33 (9%) reported that they had not completed the award. 15 of this group were at work, 5 were unemployed, and the other 13 gave studying as their main occupation. However, such small numbers cannot be generalised to national patterns.

The activities of the 329 completers on whom full information is available are summarised in table D.18. (NB: these are not exactly the same group as replied the previous year, though there is very high overlap.) The stability of the proportions taking Advanced GNVQ and BTEC National courses probably reflects the much higher propensity of successful students to respond to our questionnaires. We know that, nationally, drop-out rates[8] from level 3 vocational and prevocational courses are high: 28% for Advanced GNVQs between years 1 and 2 (1994-6 figures), and an average of 20% for BTEC and similar courses over the study period (Audit Commission 1993). While students who complete their Intermediate GNVQ and go on to a level 3 course will obviously be relatively determined, organised and motivated, we think it unlikely that there is no drop-out from this group.

The drop in numbers following other courses as compared to the previous year is balanced almost exactly by the increase in employment as a main occupation. This is quite consistent with the one year nature of many NVQs and other specific vocational courses.

[8] i.e. numbers not completing the course as distinct from those completing the course but not gaining the award.

	%	Change since the previous year
Advanced GNVQ	46	-1
BTEC National Diploma	16	+1
A Levels	-	-3
NVQ	3	-4
Other full-time course	6	-2
Employment/unemployment	28	+12
Other/unspecified	1	-3

Table D.18. Main activity of Intermediate GNVQ 'completers' in the second year after completion (n = 329)

FROM INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED GNVQ

In discussing the relative popularity of different GNVQ subjects (Part A above), we noted both the general dominance of the original 'big four', and their overwhelming importance in the school sector. An examination of Intermediate students' progression routes suggests that the dominance of a few subjects at Advanced level is likely to continue.

In the first cohort (Intermediate GNVQ taken 1993-4) ***100%*** of those respondents going on to an Advanced GNVQ did so in the same subject as their Intermediate. In the second cohort, this fell slightly: to ***94%***. Even among the third group of students, with far more titles on offer, no less than *87%* of those taking an Advanced GNVQ did so in the same areas as their Intermediate.

Our data do not tell us whether students follow these tramlines because of an overwhelming interest in their GNVQ subject, or because they think they have a greater chance of success at Advanced level if they stay in the same field, or because it is simply seen as 'normal'. We do, however, question whether three years of studying nothing but Leisure & Tourism, or Health & Social Care, is the best possible preparation for employment, higher education, or, indeed citizenship in the 21st century.

In emphasising these results, we are quite confident of the representativeness of our sample in this respect. In terms of actual subject choice, respondents progressing to Advanced GNVQs are typical of the student body as a whole *over half of whom (it will be remembered) enter their courses via Intermediate GNVQ or equivalent awards*. 34% of our Advanced GNVQ entrants chose Business, 17% Health & Social Care, 19% Leisure & Tourism and 8% Art & Design. All these figures are close to national averages. Over-sampling of Science at Intermediate level is reflected in comparable over-representation at Advanced (10% of GNVQ Advanced choices). The remaining 12% were spread over other areas.

National Diploma choices provide a contrasting profile. Almost no students chose Business (indeed, very few could have done so, since here colleges have moved almost entirely to GNVQs). Almost twice as many students in absolute terms chose Art & Design-related National Diplomas as chose Art & Design GNVQs (although both are freely available). In the Health & Social Care area, around a third chose Diplomas and two thirds GNVQs. However the figure is very different for school and college-based Intermediate students. The former almost all chose GNVQs. (All those studying in their own institution did so, since schools almost never offer Diplomas.) Among students who took their Intermediate GNVQ in colleges, almost as many selected Diplomas as GNVQs. 30% of Diploma students were in Health fields, 41% in Art & Design, and the other 29% were spread across a variety of other subjects.

GRADE-RELATED PROGRESSION

As already noted, 'completers' were more likely than 'non-completers' to continue studying. We had expected that the grade students received for their Intermediate GNVQ would also affect their progression - just as GCSE and A Level grades exert a powerful influence on candidates' later chances and activities. This expectation was the greater because we had been told by a considerable number of GNVQ team leaders of their plan to tighten Advanced GNVQ entrance criteria, and require a Merit or above for entry.

There is no evidence of any such policy change and **no significant relationship whatsoever between Intermediate GNVQ grade and either the decision to stay on for further study or the nature of additional study choices**. None of the differences between Pass/Merit/Distinction groups reach statistical significance. It would appear either that recruitment pressures have overridden previous concerns; or that staff do not consider Intermediate grades to be reliable enough, or relevant for, selection purposes. If a student completes an Intermediate GNVQ successfully, then there do not appear to be any serious barriers to their entry onto Advanced GNVQs or National Diplomas.[9]

Turning to students' future plans, we find once again that **there is no significant difference in the future plans of those with pass, merit or distinction grades on their Intermediate GNVQ**. Obviously enough, higher education plans are not going to be common among those who have already entered full-time employment. However, among those in full-time study, there are no significant differences in the plans of respondents who received Pass, Merit or Distinction grades. This in itself makes the Intermediate GNVQ quite different from 'academic track' qualifications where GCSE grades directly affect aspirations (as well as likely success in resits and A Level examinations). However, the fact that there is also **no discernible relation between Intermediate grade and first year progress on Advanced courses** (portfolios complete, tests passed) confirms this difference.

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[9] A Levels may be different. The vast majority of Intermediate students would not have been accepted on to an A Level course post-GCSE. The numbers listing them as a main course post-Intermediate GNVQ, or combining them with a GNVQ are, in absolute terms, very small, and inadequate to investigate links between A Level access and Intermediate grade.

The study did not follow any of the Intermediate sample as far as university, but it is interesting to compare plans and aspirations over time. It must be emphasised that the sample becomes less representative with each sweep, with far higher response rates for 'completers'. Also, the sample two years on from Intermediate is over-weighted with FE-based respondents. Table D.19 shows that for these 'successful' students, aspirations for higher education are maintained or strengthened over time (though a good number are aiming for 2-year rather than 3-year courses).

	Level 3 course	**Higher Education**	**Specialised training/ other F-T courses**	**Employ -ment**	**Other**
During Intermediate GNVQ[10]	74	-	-	19	7
One year after Int. GNVQ	75	-	6	14	5
Two years after Int. GNVQ	12	33	5	46	4

Table D.19. Intermediate/ex-Intermediate students' plans for the future

(a) One year hence (%)

	Higher Education	**Specialised training/ other F-T courses**	**Employ -ment**	**Other**
During Intermediate GNVQ	33	11	52	4
One year after Int. GNVQ	44	3	52	1
Two years after Int. GNVQ	28	-	68	4

(b) Three years hence (%)

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[10] The first two rows refer to the combined original and additional school-based sample

Earlier, in section D.3, we described the future plans of Advanced GNVQ students, the majority of whom aspire to higher education and specialised training. We also noted that, whereas Intermediate grades apparently bear no relationship to later progress on Advanced GNVQs or to later plans, Advanced students' plans and progress are associated with conventional academic indicators, including whether or not they are doing an A Level. This is a more predictable finding than that made for Intermediate GNVQs. The Audit Commission, for example, (1993, *op cit*) found a strong relationship between GCSE point scores and completion rates on a basked of vocational courses. This 'expected' relationship continues to operate as students leave their GNVQ courses for further study or the labour market.

Second cohort Advanced students who answered the first follow-up questionnaire (sent in the winter of their second year) were asked to provide details of their applications to higher education. Although 62% expected to be in higher education or further training the following year (and 40% three years later) only a subset of this group provided the information: 41% of the sample or 415 students.

In analysing their application choices, institutions were classified as:

- 'Russell Group': the top research universities, who comprise an informal but recognised cooperative group
- other 'old universities'
- new universities
- other institutions: e.g. Colleges of Further & Higher Education, Art Colleges.

Table D.20 shows the spread of choices in the order given by respondents (which will in many but not all cases be the same as they gave on their UCAS[11] form). Applicants could give up to six choices; but not all our respondents reported as many as six.

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[11] Universities and Colleges Admission Service

	Choice:					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Russell Group	1.4	1.9	0.9	1.6	0.7	1.2
Old universities	28.4	25.2	25.8	17.3	21.9	12.0
New universities	49.2	46.7	43.6	45.3	38.5	31.5
Other	21.0	16.4	13.1	12.3	7.2	10.4
No choice given	-	9.8	16.6	23.5	31.7	45.0

Table D.20. Type of institution applied to by 2nd year GNVQ Advanced students: %

If we compare the spread of GNVQ students' applications with the distribution of home-domiciled students among universities, it looks as follows:

	% of GNVQ students' choices	% of enrolled students
Russell Group	1	8
Old universities	25	27
New universities	56	49
Other (including Colleges of Art, Colleges of HE, specialist institutions)	18	16

Except for the under-representation of the Russell Group, the applications made are thus quite close in pattern to that of national enrolments.

Students were also asked whether their choices had been on the advice or guidance of a teacher or other centre personnel. We had expected quite large numbers to report such help, because of the history and publicity given to compacts between colleges and higher education, and especially the efforts put into securing GNVQ recognition. However, as table D.21 shows, very few students in fact report any centre involvement in their choice.

Choice no.	%
1	16.6
2	13.4
3	11.6
4	10.1
5	8.7
6	9.6

Table D.21. Percentage of students reporting centre involvement/advice on their higher education choices

FINAL DESTINATIONS

The third questionnaire sent to our Advanced students asked for activities in 1996-7: the year after the two-year GNVQ course ended. 805 responses were received - 36% of the original group and equivalent to 80% of the first follow-up respondents. However, many students answered this time who had not answered on the second occasion; and others who had answered on the second occasion did not do so on the third. The group for which we have detailed information on first year activities and second year higher education applications data and complete destination data numbers 257.

The GATE project at UCAS has been monitoring the success of GNVQ students and provides national figures on GNVQ applications and acceptance rates. These enable us to place our own students' responses in context.

Nationally,[12] among 1996 applicants to higher education, 21,308 were taking an Advanced GNVQ (with or without A Levels). This represents 40% of those who were involved in second year Advanced studies and took at least one test, but 69% of the number who actually completed the award.

Of these applicants, 61.4% were successful in securing HE acceptances. Of these, slightly under three quarters (i.e. about 44% of all applicants and around 30% of all successful completers) were offered degree places, and slightly over one quarter (18% of applicants) were offered places for HNDs.

As noted earlier, our second year respondents, representing the same cohort, were overwhelmingly still studying: and 62% expected to be in higher education or further training the next year. Among our 'third year' respondent group, a total of 48.4% had secured HE or advanced training places, and 44.7% were in or had guaranteed places for HE courses. The ratio of HNDs to degrees is almost identical to that for UCAS. Among *successful* applicants, 31% of our respondents aimed at HNDs, and 69% at degrees. If we relate this to the 62% of the second year respondents who planned/expected HE entry or specialised training, this represents a success rate of about three respondents in four (78%): rather above the GATE/UCAS figures. In this respect, therefore, the final follow-up group, as was the case for all our follow up samples, has an above average success rate on GNVQs.

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[12] Unpublished figures for 1996 applications, made available by the GATE project. The final figures may be subject to some amendment.

In the previous section we noted the apparent lack of relationship between Intermediate GNVQ grades and later progress. This is emphatically not the case with Advanced results. Respondents' likelihood of entering higher education was strongly related to their grade.[13] Numbers of respondents with A Level passes are small, but here too there is clear evidence that 'adding value' to a GNVQ pass increases students' likelihood of entering higher education. Students with A Level passes are significantly more likely to enter higher education than those without.[14] This is consistent with the detailed case studies of progression carried out at the University of Leeds (Shirtliff 1996), which indicated that admissions tutors attach considerable importance to offers of A Levels alongside GNVQs (and even more to GCSE scores). Table D.22 summarises these relationships.

	% entering HE courses (degrees or HND)
All respondents	45
All completers	54
Pass on GNVQ	31
Merit on GNVQ	59
Distinction on GNVQ	67
No A Levels (but complete GNVQ)	51
1 A Level pass	69
2 A Level passes	(83: n = 6)
1 or 2 A Levels taken/U grades only	52

Table D.22

The most detailed information available is for the 257 respondents who gave us detailed information on 1995-6 UCAS applications and on their destinations a year later. This group was rather more successful than the national average - 77% rather than 61% were successful in gaining a place.

Table D.23 elaborates on some of the information given earlier and compares their destinations with their UCAS choices and with national higher education enrolment patterns.

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[13] $p < .0001$

[14] $p < .0001$

	% of destinations: successful applicants	% of destinations: all respondents	% of UCAS choices	% of enrolled home-domiciled students
Russell Group	0.5	0.5	1	8
Old universities	21	16	25	27
New universities	49.5	38	56	49
Other (HE colleges,art and other specialist institutions)	29	22.5	18	16
Not in HE		23		

Table D.23. Destinations of GNVQ Advanced students making UCAS applications (n = 257)

Although the final distribution differs somewhat from students' original preferences, 70% - i.e. almost all those who progressed at all - went to an institution which had been *one* of their choices. However, only a little over half went to one of the universities they had named. The others went either to one of the 'other' institutions (e.g. a college of higher education) to which they had applied or (occasionally) to a different university.

THE SUBJECTS THEY TAKE

In previous reports, as in this one, we have noted that the subject taken at Advanced level is strongly associated with future plans. Science, Art & Design and Health & Social Care students are especially likely to plan further study; Leisure & Tourism and Hospitality & Catering students less. Indeed, this is one of the (few) respects in which GNVQs differ among themselves; and in ways which seem associated with different future career tracks - for example Health & Social Care students' desire to train for health-related occupations.

The effects of GNVQ subject carry through to later activity. Our survey responses indicate a very strong relationship between GNVQ subject and whether or not students actually enter higher education.[15] Relatively few do so from Leisure & Tourism, Hospitality & Catering or Construction & the Built Environment, compared to Business, Science or Art & Design. The data also show how strongly students studying a given GNVQ are either attracted to or channelled into HE courses in exactly the same area (table D.24). **While the association is less strong than at the Intermediate/Advanced transition, over three quarters enter an HE course in the same area as their GNVQ.**

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[15] $p < .0001$

	%
Business	77
Health & Social Care	73
Leisure & Tourism	74
Art & Design	82
Construction & Built Environment (n = 10)	80
Hospitality & Catering (n = 9)	66
Science	77

Table D.24. Percentage of HE entrants (degree and HND) taking courses in the same subject as their Advanced GNVQ

We do not have the data to tell how much this is 'push' and how much 'pull'. However, half of Advanced students were originally Intermediate students, virtually all of whom were studying at Advanced level the same subject as they chose at Intermediate. Many also studied entirely or partly in schools where the choice of GNVQ subject at Intermediate and Advanced levels is highly restricted. It seems likely that there is a good deal of 'push' at work here - that many students are studying these subjects at university *because* of their (restricted) choice of GNVQ.

The other striking feature of students' higher education choices is how few are entering scientific or technological disciplines. If GNVQs are providing adequately for the future workforce, then one must presume that it is a workforce with little role for technical skills as they have traditionally been understood. Registrations, completions and higher education entries in Science or Construction are each a tiny proportion of the whole, and Engineering barely larger: we estimate that well under 10% of those entering higher education from GNVQs will be in these fields. Is this desirable?

D5 GNVQs AND THE LABOUR MARKET

We have emphasised at a number of points the essentially educational nature of the current GNVQ - its mode of delivery, its failure to replace specialist options, and the aspirations of its students for further education. The nature of our follow-up respondents, who are disproportionately successful in their studies, means that we also simply have far more information about those GNVQ students who remain in the education system.

Yet for a very large proportion of registering students, an Intermediate or an Advanced GNVQ course is something of a final destination. Though many may return to education later, or receive training at work, the end of their GNVQ (whether complete or not) marks the end of the period when they are *primarily* students. The fact that so large a majority of GNVQ candidates are young people who have always been in full-time education makes this break even clearer.

At **Advanced** level, about a quarter of 2nd year students are currently entering higher education - which means only around 18% of original registrations. Among our follow-up respondents, 8% report other advanced study and training; and given the general nature of our response rates, this is probably an upper limit. Overall, therefore, **around three quarters of the students who register for an Advanced GNVQ in fact find the labour market to be their primary destination**. In other words, less than half of those students are in higher education and training three years on who planned to be; and almost twice as many are in the labour market (75% rather than 41%).

At **Intermediate** level, 52% of students complete their course, of whom about 80% continue to further study. About 40% of non-completers also go on to further education or training. Overall, about 40% of those registering for Intermediate awards proceed directly from them to the labour market.

LABOUR MARKET ENTRY

Many of us still have a picture of education and work as operating end to end: one stops and the other begins. Today, this is a highly misleading picture. Most young people combine work and study in varying amounts over a period of years. As one of our respondents remarked, 'There is really no such thing as a full-time further education student any more'.

While this may be more true in some areas than others - this comment reflected experience in the urban South-east - national data emphasise how very common combinations of work and study have become. During 1988-91, 59% of 16-18 year olds in full-time education were also employed - figures which reflected a steadily rising trend over the 1968-91 period (Micklewright et al 1994). About three quarters of this group were in 'regular' employment, with an hourly wage (as opposed to e.g. obtaining income from babysitting, acting as a mail order agent). Average hours are highest in the summer, but in all months amount to 8 or more a week - the equivalent of a full day. Data collected in summer 1992 (Hibbert and Beatson 1995) indicate even higher participation rates. 64% of 16 year olds and 77% of 17 and 18 year olds in full time education also reported working over the previous year.

Most of this group (63%) were in regular part-time employment; 7% claimed to combine full-time employment and full-time education; the rest reported intermittent work. The average number of hours worked per week was now 14.4. While this may reflect an averaging between more time in the summer and less in term time, the question asked was how long the young person worked in an *average* week.

This pattern makes it difficult to track the relationship between GNVQ study and labour market responses. What is the relevant job for comparison and study? Obviously, many students will have part-time jobs while studying for which there is no particulàr reason to expect a relationship with vocational studies. But how long after a student leaves their GNVQ course does one look in deciding whether the qualification is or is not associated with employment in the same field? The tables below present information on study and employment patterns; but for these reasons must be interpreted with care.

ADVANCED STUDENTS' DESTINATIONS

As explained above, national completion rates indicate that the response rate on our follow-up questionnaires was very high for students in the original sample who compieted their award successfully. Among non-completers, the rate was much lower. However, we do have data for 125 non-completers; and also for 366 completers who gave labour market responses when asked for their *main* current activity. (80% of this latter group were also involved in some sort of continuing studies, reflecting the increasingly common mix of education and work already noted.)

Among *non-completers*, activities in the year after the end of the Advanced course (i.e. the third year after they registered) are as follows:

	%	N
Full-time employment	34	43
Full-time employment and study	3	3
Part-time employment	11	14
Part-time employment and study	10	13
Unemployment	14	18
Unemployment and study	2	2
Full-time study	20	25
Other	6	7

Because of the small numbers it is impossible to carry out any detailed comparisons of full-time and part-time occupations - both of which may well be quite short term given the nature of early job market experience for young people in the UK. Table D25 therefore summarises the nature of all the jobs described by 'non-completing' respondents, and the percentage of incumbents whose GNVQ courses had been in that vocational area.

	% working in this area	**% of those working in this area who studied the equivalent GNVQ**
Business	17 (n = 13)	62 (n = 8)
Health & Social Care	11 (n = 8)	75 (n = 6)
Leisure & Tourism	7 (n = 5)	80 (n = 4)
Hospitality & Catering	16 (n = 12)	13 (n = 2)
Retail	36 (n = 27)	0
Production/manual	7 (n = 5)	20 (n = 1)
Other	6 (n = 6)	17 (n = 1)

Table D25. Advanced non-completers' workplace destinations

It is important to underline the *tiny* numbers involved here; but two points nonetheless emerge. The hospitality and retail industries are dominant in this market, and entry to them is largely unrelated to previous study (not surprisingly, since few Advanced GNVQs in these areas are taken up by students). Second, the column showing the percentage of jobs in an area occupied by students whose GNVQ subject was the same, suggests that there are some definite links - that students attracted by the study of Health & Social Care, or Leisure & Tourism, are indeed more likely to work in these industries even without completing their GNVQ.

We examined *completers* separately, because the apparently very different response rates for the two groups made it impossible to combine the two. Among the 369 respondents who gave labour market responses as their main activity, activities were as follows:

	%
Full time employment	32
Full time employment and HE studies (degree/HND)	5
Part-time employment	24
Part-time employment and HE	18
Part-time employment and other studies	2
Unemployment	16
Unemployment and studies	3

Table D26 provides more detailed information on the type of work being carried out. Once again, it relates area of work to previous area of study (i.e. nature of completed GNVQ). The resulting picture is also very similar. A large proportion of respondents are working in retail or catering jobs unrelated to their studies. However in some areas (e.g. Leisure, Health) jobs are very likely to be held by people whose GNVQ studies were work-related; and among full-timers, most jobs in the 'main' GNVQ occupational areas have gone to ex-students from related subjects.

	% working in this area (n = 369)	% of full-time workers in this area (n = 132)	% of those working in this area who studied the equivalent GNVQ	
			All	**Full-timers**
Business	20	35	78	83
Health & Social Care	8	11	92	93
Leisure & Tourism	6	8	94	100
Art & Design	3	4	38	60
Hospitality & Catering	17	12	22	63
Retail	40	22	0	0
Other	6	8	4	5

Table D.26. Advanced completers' workplace destinations (n = 369)

The final data in this section relate to Intermediate students. Section D.4 above has already discussed their post-GNVQ destinations in some detail; so here we present only the information on the nature of jobs held, and links with GNVQ subject area. Table D.27 shows that the pattern is very similar indeed to that for Advanced respondents.

	%	% of those working in this area who studied equivalent GNVQ
Business	23	83
Health & Social Care	19	80
Leisure & Tourism	4	80 (n = 5)
Art & Design	1	50 (n = 1)
Hospitality & Catering	12	0
Retail	33	0
Other	8	14 (n = 3)

Table D.27. Intermediate students' workplace destinations (n = 193)

As so often, we can look at these results in two ways, and choose whether we call the cup half full or half empty. There is a consistent and very encouraging indication that GNVQ study does help students to get jobs in related areas; but one must not jump from this to concluding that it helps *all* students to do so. For every Intermediate Business student who reports working in this area, there are two who do not; for every such Leisure & Tourism student, three who do not. And the absence from most centres' programmes of anything but a very limited selection of titles leaves much of the UK labour market untouched by any direct GNVQ input. We return to these issues in the next and final section of the report.

E: GNVQs and post-compulsory education

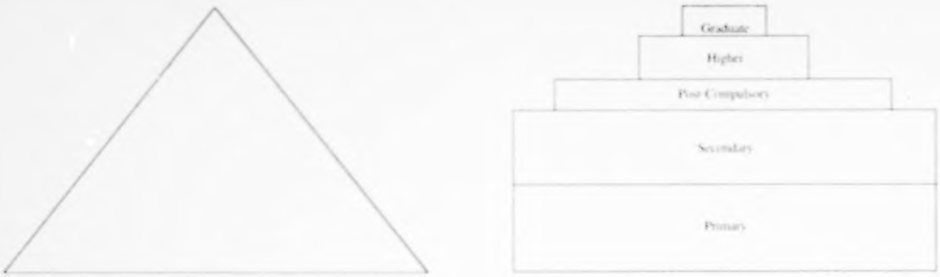
So far this report has been largely devoted to the empirical findings of the study's own research. In this final section, we attempt to place these in the general context of post-compulsory education in the late 1990s; and in so doing evaluate the current role of GNVQs, and the degree to which they have fulfilled their original purpose.

E1 THE QUALIFICATIONS EXPLOSION

A great deal of recent policy-making in the United Kingdom has been fuelled by comparisons between this country and others; comparisons which are almost invariably to the UK's disadvantage. This is particularly true of the policies which have produced NVQs and GNVQs, and which underpin the wave of government activism in the field of vocational education and training. Politicians and opinion-formers have been alike in their conviction that what was needed was a complete re-making of vocational education, in scale and in content. Without it, the country would fall ever further behind in a competitive, global market.

Yet if one takes a rather longer view, and wider perspective, what is striking about the last century is the similarity between developed countries in the way their education and training systems have evolved. Early this century, the typical system was one of universal elementary education for the vast bulk of the population (to around age 13); after which they left school for apprenticeships or work. A small middle class enjoyed secondary schooling; a tiny proportion continued to university.

Figure 1 (reproduced from Wolf 1997) contrasts this pyramidal structure of the early 20th century with the typical picture as we enter the next millennium. Secondary education is now universal; more and more young people stay on beyond the compulsory leaving age; higher education is now a mass pursuit. This is the context into which GNVQs were introduced - one of mass education over a long period of time, and of an explosion in the number of formal qualifications. To understand how and why GNVQs have evolved as they have, it is necessary to understand this context.



Early 20th century **Late 20th century**

Figure E.1. The changing structure of education: early and late 20th century participation

STAYING ON RATES

In the previous pages we have referred, at a number of points, to the increase in participation rates which occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s. The number and proportion of young people staying in education after the end of compulsory schooling has been rising steadily, if undramatically, for the whole of the post-war period; but for many years, the average for England, in particular, was strikingly lower than for most other European or OECD countries.

However, in the mid-80s, there was a sudden acceleration in that rate of increase. Participation rose at enormous speed to levels much closer to the international norm . In 1980 only 42% of the age-cohort was in full time education. By just 14 years later -when the playgroup children of 1980 took their GCSEs - it had risen to 72%. An additional 275,000 students were in the process of selecting courses for post-compulsory study. It was to this growing population that the government offered GNVQs, alongside NVQs, A Levels, GCSEs - and, it turned out, older vocational qualifications as well. The 1994 GNVQ cohort which has been the main focus of our study thus fully represents this new high-participation society.

ACADEMIC OUTPUTS

Rising participation rates could, in theory, have taken a number of different forms: an increasing attraction to work-based learning outside formal institutions, or large increases in enrolments for technician courses and qualifications. In fact, the fastest growth has been in traditional academic qualifications; and this is true not only in England, but throughout Western Europe and the rest of the developed world. (See especially *Assessment in Education* 1997.)

Over the last 10 years there has been a steady increase not only in the number of GCSEs taken but also in the proportions of young people gaining 'good' results; conventionally understood as 5 or more GCSEs at grades A-C. Achievements at lower grades have risen more or less in line1 (although writing in 1997 achievement levels seem, for the moment, to have stabilised). At the same time, the number of A Levels taken and passed, and the percentage of the age cohort entering A Level courses have also soared. Over a third (35%) of the age cohort were following A Level courses in 1994/5, compared to less than 20% a decade earlier. Moreover, less than two-thirds of A Level entries are from the 'core' population of young people who enter 2 year courses straight from GCSE. Huge numbers of older students also return to education to study for A Levels.

During this same period, the government has tracked a series of nationally representative cohorts of young people, from school-leaving age until (in most cases) three years on. This 'England and Wales Youth Cohort Study' enables us to track the decisions made by comparable groups of young people taking GCSEs in the period 1986-1993 (i.e. the year before most of this study's GNVQ respondents). The consistent finding is that students with high GCSE grades enter A Levels, although the entry standard for such programmes has in fact risen; something made possible by the general rise in GCSE attainments. If we look at full-time year 12 students in the most recent YCS group, almost 100% of those with 9+ A-C grades are doing A Levels, as are over 90% of those with 8, and over 50% of those with 5. After that, there is a sharp fall: only 30% of those with 4 A-C grades (plus other lower ones) are on A Level courses. (See especially Payne et al 1996.)

One of the forces fuelling this rapid increase in A Level students has been the comparable rise in university places and students. In 1957-8 there were 98,000 full-time undergraduates students in UK universities. In 1967-8 there were 205,000. By 1985, the growth in part-time students and the development of the polytechnics had taken total numbers well over the half million mark; but new funding policies, which gave universities a strong incentive to increase recruitment, then generated another period of even faster growth. By the mid-90s there were almost 900,000 home-domiciled full-time first degree and higher diploma students, and part-time and postgraduate numbers increased the total to over one and a half million students. This level of growth meant, in effect, that there was a place *of some sort* available for any applicant with two A Level passes - and a large number of places still available even after A Level student entries.2 'Non-traditional' student entries grew rapidly. The largest group consisted of adults, who entered via access courses; but, during the 1980s and early 1990s, entry to higher education via a BTEC National or equivalent diploma also became increasingly common.

How, in the meantime, did young people regard vocational options? While A Levels absorbed very large numbers, in the mid-90s this group nonetheless comprised rather less than half of those staying on in full-time education post-16. For other young people, the full-time educational choices were GCSE resits, and 'traditional' awards (BTEC, City & Guilds, RSA, NNEB etc.) up to 1993, and GNVQs as well thereafter. In addition, for those not staying on full-time, there were apprenticeships, or Youth Training.

Data from the Youth Cohort study for the period 1984-93 indicate that, over this decade, the popularity of **full-time** vocational options grew substantially. In 1984/5, 31% of those in full-time post-compulsory education were aiming at a vocational qualification; 10 years later in 1993/4, this had grown to 42%. The huge increase in staying-on rates meant that, as a proportion of the age-cohort, the increase was even greater. In 1984/5, 15% of the age-cohort was in full-time vocational programmes at age 16. In 1993/4, which is also the year when GNVQs first became generally available, this had grown to 30%.3 (Payne op cit p.5).

There was no such growth in formal work-based training. On the contrary; as the proportions in full-time education soared, so those in apprenticeship or YT programmes fell. The Youth Cohort data indicate a decline between 1989 and 1992 from 32% of the cohort to 20%. This drop includes a fall of about a third in apprenticeship (from 13% to 9% of the cohort) and one of rather more than a third in YT, which fell from enrolling about 18% of the cohort in 1989 to 11% three years later (Payne op cit p. 11).

Since young people in YT and apprenticeships tend to be offered NVQs as their main qualification, this relative (and absolute) decline in the numbers choosing a work-based route had obvious implications for NVQ take-up among younger age-groups. Confirmation of this comes from recent (1994-5) college enrolment data. NVQs at levels 1, 2 *and* 3 make up only 12% of qualifications currently being taken in the college sector. 35% of NVQ candidates are aged 16-18 (i.e. 4% of college-based qualifications involve 'young' NVQ candidates). Only a quarter of those - about 1% of the whole set of college-delivered qualifications - are recorded as involving YT candidates, although many YT candidates will of course be taking NVQs in approved assessment centres outside colleges.

QUALIFICATIONS AND OCCUPATIONAL SUCCESS

GNVQs were thus launched into an educational and training environment where massive changes were well advanced. It was one in which, for more and more young people, the relevant choice was not whether to stay on at 16, but which course to do when they did.

That choice, in turn, involved a clear hierarchy related to previous academic achievement: the more successful at GCSE, the more likely to take A Levels, the less likely to opt for a vocational course. While politicians (and senior industrialists) were indulging in a great deal of rhetoric about parity of esteem, this hierarchy reflected young people's realism about the way the job market actually operates. As recent analyses of Labour Force Survey data show (Robinson 1997), someone with a craft certificate can expect, in early middle age, to be earning only between a fifth and a quarter more than a contemporary with no formal qualifications at all. Someone with a degree, by contrast, will on average be earning almost twice as much; and someone with 'only' A Levels will still earn more than half as much again as their unqualified peer. As for vocational qualifications, at lower than craft (NVQ3) level, they show virtually no earnings pay-off at all. An environment which combined these relative payoffs with the opportunity for over a third of school-leavers to enter HE is the one which also tightly circumscribed the requirements for a 'successful' new qualification.

E2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF GNVQS: THE CONSTRAINTS OF CONTEXT

The environment into which GNVQs were launched explains a great deal about how they developed. If we take a number of the main findings of the study, they can be related very clearly to many of the developments outlined above.

REJECTION OF NVQS

One of the objectives set for GNVQs was that they should

> **be clearly related to the occupationally specific NVQs...**

However, the survey results indicate, quite consistently, that hardly any GNVQ students are taking NVQs or NVQ units with their GNVQs. They also express no interest in doing so. Colleges emphasise that GNVQ and NVQ populations are quite distinct (while school-based students do not, in general, have the option of taking NVQ units anyway).

The shift away from work-based training, the increase in enrolments for full-time vocational courses, and the importance to young people of qualifications with HE currency all made this development highly predictable - and one which is unlikely to change.

The longer people stay in education, and the more qualifications they take, the more important the latter become in determining life-chances, and the more they develop a well understood hierarchy of their own (See e.g. Wolf 1997, Assessment in Education 1997). By 1993, when GNVQs were first generally introduced, England, Wales and Northern Ireland were already 'high participation' societies. Education for 16-18 year olds played an important role in selection and filtering for the whole cohort; with GCSE results playing the main role in determining later pathways. In other words, the environment was one in which academic indicators had the dominant role.

Our study shows that GNVQs fitted immediately into this structure. From very early on, they developed a clear niche, defined by the modal GCSE results of entrants. Students with very high GCSE grades continued to choose A Levels, just as they had before GNVQs appeared. (Less than 2% of Advanced GNVQ candidates have an A at Maths or Science GCSE.) Those a bit lower down the GCSE rankings chose level 3 full-time vocational awards - Diplomas or, now, GNVQs. Further down still came Intermediate GNVQs.

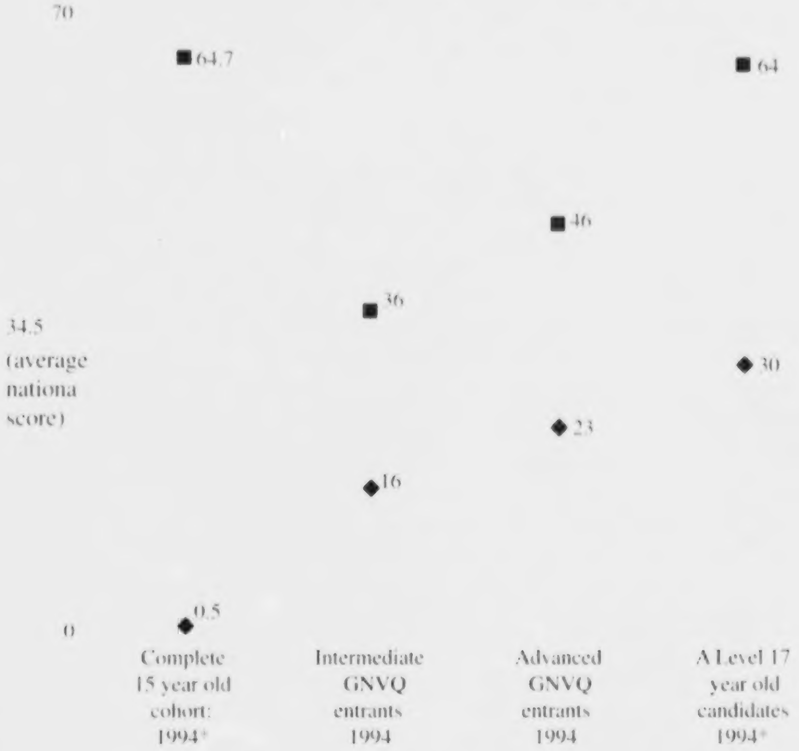


Figure E.2. GCSE point scores: distribution of scores for different age and qualification groups

* i.e. those 15 or 17 at the start of 1993-4.

Figure E.2 summarises the picture, which is discussed at some length in Part C of this report. It is one which appears to us to be highly stable, and again, to be explained by and predicted from the environment in which GNVQs operate. At level 3 it appears clear that GNVQs have not met the requirement that they should

> **be of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level.**

The picture for Intermediate GNVQs is rather more complex and we return to it below.

FULL-TIME STUDY IN COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

Recent changes in participation rates and patterns have, as described above, increased the importance of full-time study for young people at the expense of part-time courses. GNVQs have certainly not changed this picture. The data presented above shows that the students they attract are overwhelmingly full-time, as well as overwhelmingly young. They are also, and to an increasing degree, to be found in schools as well as colleges, with profound implications for the nature of 'vocational' programmes of study. In these respects, GNVQs have more than fulfilled the intention that they

> **be suitable for use by full-time students in colleges, and if appropriate in schools.**

This same rise in full-time participation also meant that the numerical target set for GNVQs was not, in 1993, very difficult to achieve. As noted above, the Youth Cohort Study indicates that 30% of 16 year olds were already on full-time vocational courses at that point. The target set for GNVQs was that they and A Level systems should 'provide the main basis for programmes of study of students aged 16-19 in full-time education' and that

> **25% of 16 year olds should be on GNVQ courses by 1996.**

While some existing full-time vocational courses were not going to be suitable for conversion to GNVQs, wholesale substitution for existing vocational awards should have taken GNVQs close to this target all on its own. In fact, as discussed in section B, such substitution has been less than wholesale, especially at level 3. Although GNVQs have also replaced many older GCSE resit courses, in 1995-6 the participation rate among 16 years olds for all GNVQ levels combined was still only around 20%.

GNVQs AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Another key feature of early 1990s Britain was, as outlined above, the ongoing revolution in higher education. The study confirms that, here too, the new qualifications fitted directly into the developing network of links between different secondary courses, and different higher courses and institutions. GNVQ students at both Intermediate and Advanced levels articulated the ambitions for continued education and training which had become increasingly realistic for succeeding cohorts.

Many of them achieved their objectives; although here too filters and hierarchies are in full evidence. Many Intermediate students do not complete their courses or proceed to the level 3 qualifications they planned; many Advanced candidates similarly do not complete or advance as they intended. Among those who do, grades on their GNVQ matter, as does their success in combining a GNVQ with an A Level; and they are more likely to attend new universities and higher education colleges, and to do HNDs rather than degrees, than is the case for young HE entrants as a whole. Overall, they remain, so far, a tiny proportion (c. 5%) of new HE entrants.

Nonetheless, in this case GNVQs have clearly achieved their objective. They were designed to be

> **an accepted route to...higher education**

and they clearly have become precisely that.

E3 GNVQS: A DISTINCTIVE AWARD

The previous section emphasised the extent to which the development of GNVQs followed, and indeed could have been predicted from the general educational environment into which they were introduced. We have noted young people's growing determination to stay in education post-16; to enter higher education; and to choose full-time and general options over work-based ones. The evolution of GNVQs as a predominantly educational award, viewed by its students as a pathway to further studies, follows logically. Nor has the study found any evidence that GNVQs have increased general participation levels.

Nonetheless, there are important ways in which GNVQs have exerted an independent influence on the country's education and training framework. The most important, in our view, is the change in the role played by schools; but we would also highlight the distinctive nature of the Intermediate GNVQ, and the impact it has had on patterns of study.

THE CHANGING ROLE OF SCHOOLS

As we pointed out in Part A, at the start of the 1990s, vocational education, whether narrowly or broadly defined, was effectively the prerogative of further education colleges or specialist training providers. There had been a number of attempts to provide alternative qualifications for non-A Level students (notably CPVE); but these remained low-status and/or largely unknown and unrecognised outside the a small part of the education sector.

GNVQs changed all this because they made it possible, from the very start, for schools to apply for registration as centres in exactly the same way as colleges. Moreover, like GCSEs or A Levels, but unlike older certificates, GNVQs were offered by several awarding bodies, which therefore had a strong incentive to look and compete for business. The result has been an explosion in the number of centres which offer full-time 'vocational' courses. Schools have competed actively for post-compulsory GNVQ students; and at the time of writing, we estimate that a quarter of Advanced GNVQ candidates and almost half of Intermediate ones are to be found in schools.

This development is unlikely to be reversed. It offers young people greater choice of institution - but often only within a very restricted group of awards, since schools offer little but the 'big 4' GNVQs (Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care and Leisure & Tourism). It also means that many vocational courses are offered in institutions whose dominant culture is that of academic study for young people and where few staff have recent industrial experience. The implications of this major shift in the location of vocational students has not yet been addressed by policy-makers.

THE IMPACT OF INTERMEDIATE GNVQs

Because universities have such a high public profile, and because university entrance is so important to young people, a large part of the publicity accorded to GNVQs has actually dealt only with **Advanced** awards. Yet our study suggests that these have in fact been the least distinctive of the GNVQs. They have substituted directly but very imperfectly for older level 3 diplomas (either in the same institution or by attracting students to schools instead of colleges); and are treated in the same way by HE selectors.

Intermediate awards, on the other hand, have had a far greater effect on the pattern of post-compulsory studies, and also have some quite unusual features of their own. Advanced GNVQs have generally substituted for pre-existing and highly similar awards; Intermediate awards, by comparison, have both substituted for 'comparable' vocational qualifications (DVE, BTEC First Diplomas) *and* accelerated the decline of GCSE re-sit programmes. It is true that these peaked in 1991/2, before the introduction of GNVQs, and that there was already a substitution of full-time vocational awards for GCSEs underway by 1993 (Spours op cit p.15, Payne op cit p.20) Nonetheless, our institutional survey data indicate very strongly that, by introducing a clearly recognised, national award for post-compulsory students with low GCSE

grades, the government provided a welcome alternative to programmes which staff (and the Inspectorate) found highly unsatisfactory.

One of the great strengths of Intermediate GNVQs is that they offer a clear, transparent progression route. Students with poor GCSE grades can progress via these to a level 3 award (GNVQ and, often, Diploma: see Part D above). This, too, was not entirely new; many students also progressed via BTEC Firsts to National Diplomas, for example. But the national structure and levels make the possibility much clearer to everyone involved, as indicated by the fact that over half of the Advanced GNVQ intake consists of 'deferred entry' students.

Intermediate GNVQs also have a number of distinctive features whose desirability is more difficult to assess. As described in section D, levels of success on Intermediate awards do not bear any obvious relationship to previous academic performance. Provided they complete the qualification, students' grades do not affect the likelihood of their being accepted onto a higher level award, nor are they related to their first year performance on an Advanced GNVQ. This is an extremely unusual pattern - quite different from that found for academic awards or for Advanced GNVQs. On the one hand, it suggests that Intermediate GNVQs may be recognising and rewarding qualities such as organisation and persistence rather than conventional 'cleverness'. On the other hand, it may also that the award has very little independent value because users and gatekeepers do not know how to interpret its coverage or the meaning of its grades.

E4 ARE GNVQS VOCATIONAL?

In their very early days, GNVQs were gNVQs - that is, (general) National Vocational Qualifications rather than *General* NVQs. The evidence of our study is that they are now, overall, far more general than they are vocational. Are there nonetheless respects in which they still, as compared to A Levels or GCSEs, offer more of

a broad preparation for employment

or, in Dearing's words, 'a broad education in terms of applying knowledge and understanding to the world of work'?

PATHWAYS INTO WORK

As noted above, because a very high proportion of supposedly 'full-time' students are also in paid work for substantial amounts of time each week, it is very difficult to judge which jobs should be evaluated for any possible GNVQ influence or input. Is the first full-time job the relevant one? the first job after completing a course, or leaving it? the first to be held by the incumbent for more than, say, six months? The questions themselves underline the fluid state of the modern labour market, and the fact that we are educating young people for a range of jobs in a changing economy rather than for a single lifetime employment.

It is nonetheless interesting both to compare job types and courses of study; and, particularly, to look at the occupations of those respondents who, during the study, entered the workforce full-time. Some did so after completing their GNVQ, others after leaving their courses before completion.

These data, discussed in detail in Part D, indicate two things. The first is that a very high proportion of young people are working in sectors which are unrelated to their GNVQ subject. This is particularly true for part-time work, but also applies to full-time workers. The relationship (or lack of it) between work and study is heavily influenced by the fact that a high proportion of young people work in retail or in hospitality and catering. However, very few choose GNVQs in these areas - mostly, it appears, because they make a positive choice for other areas, but partly, no doubt, because few centres offer them.

However, if one looks at jobs, and especially at full-time workers, in areas with big GNVQ recruitments - Business, Leisure, Health and Social Care - then the picture is rather different. Only a minority work in these areas; but of these, a high proportion studied the corresponding GNVQ. In other words, there is evidence that a GNVQ in an occupational area does provide a link to related employment - though only for a proportion of those involved. In this sense, **GNVQs are providing a preparation for employment.**

We nonetheless feel that the numbers not working in their GNVQ area, and the nature of the modern economy and labour market indicate the need to think again about what a 'broad preparation' might actually mean. One of the findings of the study which we consider disturbing is the degree to which Intermediate students more or less automatically stay within the same study area if they continue to an Advanced GNVQ; and the extent to which Advanced students do the same at higher education entry.

We are not convinced that this is, in most cases, evidence of an early and fixed commitment to some specific occupation. There is plenty of independent evidence to support the 1991 White Paper's contention that 'many young people want to keep their options open'; nor is the idea of fixed choices easily reconciled with these same students' rejection of NVQs. Equally important, surely, are the limited choices of subject offered, especially in schools, and the students' own (probably correct) estimates of where they have most chance of entry to and success at the next level. In any case, since most will not work in these areas for a life-time, and may well never do so, **we question whether this pattern is 'broad', or appropriate for either the students or the country.**

An examination of the modern economy raises further questions about the extent to which GNVQ enrolment patterns, taken as a whole, prepare their students for the world of employment. In recent years, a number of commentators have remarked with concern on the relative decline of mathematics and science A Levels. Although the absolute number of entries in mathematics and the physical sciences has remained fairly constant, the huge growth in A Levels described above has all come elsewhere, so that the proportions studying maths and science have fallen.

The figures presented in Parts A and B show that, in full-time vocational programmes (and in part-time National Certificates) there has been even more of a shift to the non-mathematical and non-scientific. *Absolute* numbers of 'level 3' entries for Advanced GNVQ and BTEC Certificates and Diplomas combined have been falling steadily in engineering and construction. In Science, registrations have grown by less than 2000 over the last 5 years, from seven and a half thousand to a little over nine; by comparison, there are currently 25,000 registrations a year for art and design and almost as many in caring. As figure E3 shows, as GNVQs have expanded, the share of 'technical' options has remained tiny.

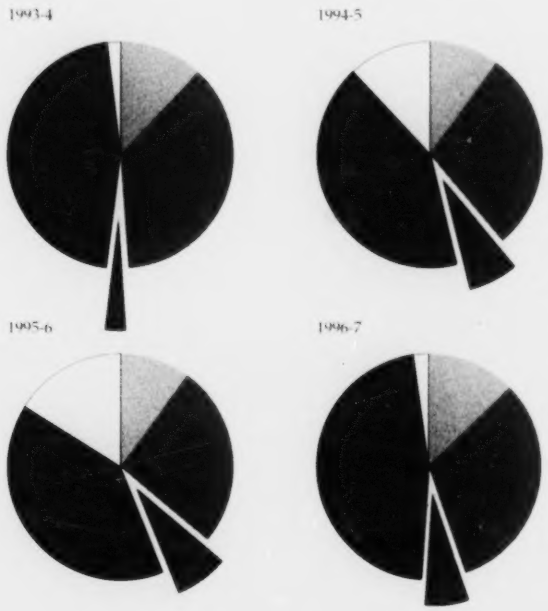
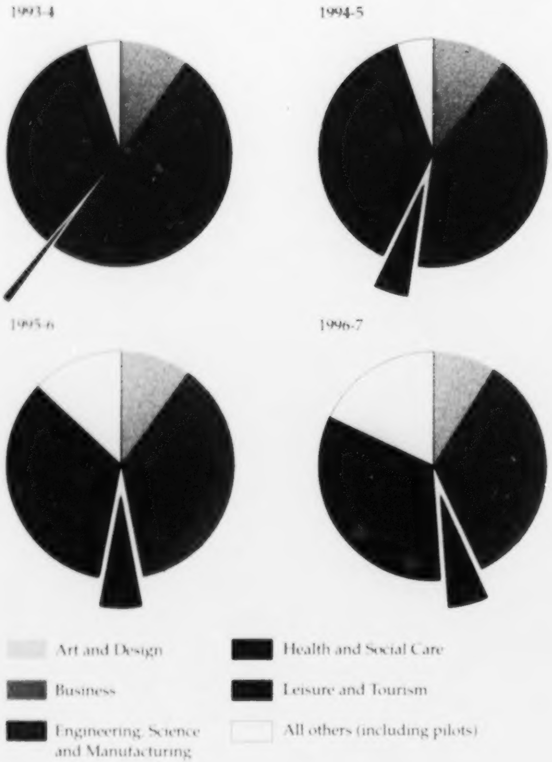


Figure E.3

*(a) Proportions of registrations for different Intermediate GNVQs**



(b) Proportions of registrations for different Advanced GNVQs

* *Source NCVQ*

As in so many other areas, GNVQs have reflected and perhaps consolidated an existing trend. Does it matter? Manufacturing employment has been falling everywhere, largely because of the increased productivity delivered by technical innovation. In the EU as a whole it has fallen from above 30% in 1970 to about 20% in 1994. In the service industries employment has grown instead.

But it does not follow that the world has de-industrialised, or that scientific, mathematical and technical skills have ceased to matter. On the contrary. Mathematics and technology underpin everything in our societies to an increasing degree, and place new demands on 'service' industries just as much as they do on manufacturing. The highest-paying and most voracious consumers of job-seekers with quantitative skills are the 'service' industries of finance and insurance. In this context, it is time we stopped thinking of History, or even Business, as a 'general' education, and Engineering or Construction as only for those with a specific lifetime job commitment; and rethought just what a 'broad' preparation for employment should imply.

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E5 CONCLUSION

This report has studied GNVQs from their inception through to a point where, without further government intervention, they are likely to stabilise in terms of take-up, delivery patterns, and effects on students' pathways. At one level they have clearly been a success. Centres have adopted them, and students enrolled on them; they are a major component of post-16 study for full-timers; and they offer a coherent route for progression from GCSE to higher education. It is perhaps no surprise that they have not managed to be all things to all people, to be at the same time fully educational and truly vocational, or to achieve the holy grail of 'parity of esteem'. They are creatures of their time, which reflect and ride with major underlying movements in the world of education and training.

There are, nonetheless, major areas for concern. Drop-out rates are high. GNVQs are predominantly educational rather than vocational qualifications, but with an educational content which is not obviously broad or well conceptualised in terms of a 21st century economy. They do not provide an adequate substitute for a range of more specialised and popular awards; nor are they proving attractive or suitable for adults or part-timers. And while they have been the mechanism which effected a transformation in school programmes, and in where young vocational or 'applied' students are to be found, the result has been that many students are offered only a very narrow choice of programme. All of these issues should, in our view, be addressed at the earliest possible moment.

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Appendix I Note on weighting

The 2201 approved centres for GNVQs in 1994/5 break down into 1618 schools, 382 FE colleges, 115 VIth form colleges and 86 other institutions. We use this breakdown to obtain estimates of approximate student enrolments by sector (using our sector sample means as estimates of the strata population means) and by subject, and estimated approximate figures for percentages of centres offering different GNVQs, as follows.

A ENROLMENTS BY SECTOR

We estimate the total enrolment (i.e. number of active GNVQ students in February 1995) as (av. schools)(Nschools) + (av. FE)(NFE) + (av. VI)(NVI); this is 32(1618)+224(382)+152(115) = 154 824. This does not include enrolments in other (non school, FE or VIth form) institutions, so the actual figure might be slightly higher. The actual number of *registrations* in December 1994, based on aggregated awarding body statistics, was 162 851.

This then gives us an estimate of the percentage enrolment in schools 32(1618)/154824, or 33%. Similarly we obtain 55% for FE colleges and 11% for VIth form colleges. Note that as we have no data from other types of institutions we cannot say what fraction of enrolment they may represent; it will be distributed evenly among the three percentages calculated here.

The same procedure was used (with December 1995 registrations) for 1995-6 estimates.

B PERCENTAGES OF CENTRES OFFERING GNVQs

Note that as we have no specialist institutions in our sample, the following is only relevant for GNVQs in FE colleges, schools and VIth form colleges.

We proceed similarly; using weightings derived from our sample percentages for each stratum; e.g. estimated number of centres offering Intermediate Art & Design, 1994/5 is (fraction of schools offering)(Nschools) + (frac. FE)(NFE) + (frac. VI)(NVI), which is (0.27)(1618)+(0.75)(382)+(0.67)(115) = 801. There are 2115 schools, colleges and VIth form colleges offering GNVQs in total, so this represents 37% of centres offering.

Note that here, as elsewhere, the weights used for VIth form college results may be slightly inaccurate due to the small size of the VIth form college sample.

C AVERAGE OVERALL ENROLMENTS

We estimate the total enrolment in each subject area (similarly to (a) above) and divide by the estimated total number of centres offering GNVQs in that area (derived as in (b)).

Expressed more formally, a weighted mean $m = \sum W_h m^{(h)}$, was used, where $m^{(h)}$ is the mean in stratum h (FE college, SFC or school), $W_h = N_h/N$, and N_h is the (estimated) number of students in stratum h, calculated as in Appendix 2 of the 1994-5 project report.

For computational convenience in analysing the student sample we assign a weight $w^{(h)}i$ to each *student* (the same for all students in each institutional type, but different between types). The weights are calculated as $w^{(h)}{}_i = N_h/n_h$, and then it is easy to see that $\sum h \sum i w^{(h)}{}_i x^{(h)}{}_i / \sum\sum w^{(h)} i$ gives an equivalent expression for the mean of the x_i .

The use of weighting in this manner allows us to give a better prediction of overall averages (for example as in the age distribution or if we wish to consider 'average prior GCSE score of Advanced GNVQ students). However when particular items differ greatly between institutional types it is necessary to consider them separately in any case — in such cases overall summaries are not very useful. The *overall statistics* (i.e. only those combined across institutional types) presented in this paper have been weighted as explained above, to correct the imbalance in favour of FE colleges.

Appendix II GNVQs Offered by Centres, by Sector

	No. (%) offering 1993-4	No. (%) expecting (in 1993-4) to offer in 1994-5	No. (%) actually offering in 1994-5	No. (%) expecting to offer (in 1995) in 1995-6	No. (%) actually offering in 1995-6	No. (%) planning to offer (in 1996) in 1996-7
A&D Adv	7 (28)	14 (56)	14 (56)	17 (68)	14 (56)	14 (56)
A&D Int	10 (40)	18 (72)	19 (76)	18 (72)	19 (76)	19 (76)
Bus Adv	15 (60)	21 (84)	21 (84)	22 (88)	22 (88)	22 (88)
Bus Int	14 (56)	21 (84)	20 (80)	21 (84)	20 (80)	22 (88)
C&BE Adv	3 (12) *	9 (36)	7 (28)	10 (40)	7 (28)	8 (32)
C&BE Int	3 (12) *	9 (36)	5 (20)	9 (36)	7 (28)	10 (40)
H&SC Adv	8 (32)	16 (64)	17 (68)	19 (76)	17 (68)	17 (68)
H&SC Int	14 (56)	20 (80)	18 (72)	19 (76)	18 (72)	19 (76)
H&C Adv	1 (4) *	8 (32)	5 (20)	7 (28)	6 (24)	9 (36)
H&C Int	1 (4) *	8 (32)	4 (16)	7 (28)	5 (24)	10 (40)
L&T Adv	9 (36)	20 (80)	21 (84)	21 (84)	21 (84)	21 (84)
L&T Int	12 (48)	20 (80)	20 (80)	20 (80)	19 (76)	21 (84)
Man Adv	1 (4)	3 (12)	3 (12)	4 (16)	4 (16)	5 (20)
Man Int	4 (16)	6 (24)	4 (16)	5 (20)	4 (16)	6 (24)
Sci Adv	3 (12) *	10 (40)	10 (40)	13 (52)	12 (48)	12 (48)
Sci Int		9 (36)	7 (28)	14 (56)	5 (20)	9 (36)

Table II.i. GNVQs offered by FE colleges: Centres responding to all surveys: 1, 2 & 3 (n = 25)

** run as pilots*

	No. (%) Offering 1993-4	No. (%) expecting (in 1994) to offer in 1994-5	No. (%) actually offering in 1994-5	No. (%) expecting to offer (in 1995) in 1995-6	No. (%) actually offering in 1995-6	No. (%) planning to offer (in 1996) in 1996-7
A&D Int	7 (14)	15 (31)	11 (22)	15 (31)	13 (27)	14 (29)
Bus Adv	16 (33)	29 (59)	28 (57)	33 (67)	32 (65)	35 (71)
Bus Int	31 (63)	39 (80)	39 (80)	40 (82)	36 (73)	37 (76)
C&BE Adv	0 (0) *	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
C&BE Int	0 (0) *	1 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
H&SC Adv	2 (4)	10 (20)	12 (25)	20 (41)	17 (35)	25 (51)
H&SC Int	19 (39)	33 (67)	32 (65)	38 (78)	33 (67)	33 (67)
H&C Adv	0 (0) *	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (2)
H&C Int	0 (0) *	2 (4.1)	1 (2)	2 (4)	1 (2)	1 (2)
L&T Adv	5 (10)	11 (22)	10 (20)	11 (22)	10 (20)	15 (31)
L&T Int	11 (22)	20 (41)	19 (29)	24 (49)	21 (43)	25 (51)
Man Adv	0 (0)	3 (6)	1 (2)	3 (6.1)	1 (2)	2 (4)
Man Int	5 (10)	7 (14)	5 (10)	7 (14)	7 (14)	7 (14)
Sci Adv	0 (0) *	3 (6.1)	2 (4)	7 (14)	7 (14)	7 (14)
Sci Int	0 (0) *	5 (10.2)	4 (8)	7 (14)	5 (10)	9 (18)

Table II.ii. GNVQs offered by schools: Centres responding to all surveys: 1, 2 & 3 (n = 49)

** run as pilots*

	No. offering 1994-5	No. expecting to offer 1995-6	No. offering 1995-6	No. expecting to offer 1995-6
A&D Adv	3 (50)	4 (67)	5 (83)	3 (50)
A&D Int	4 (67)	4 (67)	5 (83)	5 (83)
Bus Adv	5 (83)	6 (100)	6 (100)	6 (100)
Bus Int	4 (67)	6 (100)	6 (100)	6 (100)
C&BE Adv	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
C&BE Int	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (17)	1 (17)
Eng Adv	–	–	0 (0)	0 (0)
Eng Int	–	–	5 (83)	5 (83)
H&C Adv	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
H&C Int	0 (0)	0 (0)	–	–
H&SC Adv	4 (67)	4 (67)	5 (83)	5 (83)
H&SC Int	4 (67)	5 (83)	5 (83)	5 (83)
IT Adv	–	–	2 (34)	2 (34)
IT Int	–	–	2 (34)	2 (34)
L&T Adv	3 (50)	4 (67)	5 (83)	5 (83)
L&T Int	3 (50)	3 (50)	4 (67)	4 (67)
Man Adv	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (17)	2 (34)
Man Int	0 (0)	1 (17)	2 (34)	2 (34)
Media Adv	–	–	1 (17)	1 (17)
Media Int	–	–	1 (17)	1 (17)
Retail Adv	–	–	0 (0)	0 (0)
Retail Int	–	–	0 (0)	0 (0)
Sci Adv	1 (17)	3 (50)	5 (83)	5 (83)
Sci Int	3 (50)	5 (83)	3 (50)	3 (50)

Table II.iii. Matched sets 2 and 3: Sixth form colleges (n = 7)

GNVQ	% of centres offering 1994-5	% planning to offer 1995-6
Art & Design Advanced	35	50
Art & Design Intermediate	52	46
Business Advanced	87	79
Business Intermediate	81	75
Construction & Built Environment Advanced	0	N/A
Construction & Built Environment Intermediate	3	N/A
Hospitality & Catering Advanced	0	11
Hospitality & Catering Intermediate	3	7
Health & Social Care Advanced	68	68
Health & Social Care Intermediate	81	75
Leisure & Tourism Advanced	61	71
Leisure & Tourism Intermediate	68	64
Manufacturing Advanced	3	7
Science Advanced	19	36
Science Intermediate	32	50

Table IIiv. Percentage of sixth form colleges offering GNVQs 1994-5 (n = 31)

Appendix III

A STUDENT REGISTRATION PATTERNS BY SECTOR

	1993-4	1994-5	1995-6	1996-7
Art & Design	12	12	10	10
Business	37	30	29	26
Construction & Built Environment	–	1	1	1
Engineering	–	2	4	5
Health & Social Care	28	25	23	21
Hospitality & Catering	–	2	2	2
Leisure & Tourism	18	19	19	19
Manufacturing	3	1	1	1
Science	–	4	4	4
All others (including pilots)	2	4	7	11

*Table III.i. Proportions of student registrations for different Intermediate GNVQs**

**Source: NCVQ*

	1993-4	1994-5	1995-6	1996-7
Art & Design	10	10	10	9
Business	50	40	37	34
Construction & Built Environment	–	3	2	2
Engineering	–	1	3	4
Health & Social Care	16	17	16	16
Hospitality & Catering	–	3	3	3
Leisure & Tourism	18	19	18	17
Manufacturing	0.5	0.5	–	–
Science	–	3	3	3
All others (including pilots)	5.5	3.5	8	12

*Table III.ii. Proportions of student registrations for different Advanced GNVQs**

**Source: NCVQ*

Note: Manufacturing registrations fall well below 0.5% in 1995-6 and 1996-7.

B CORE SKILLS DELIVERY BY SUBJECT

	% reporting (n = 990)										
	No separately timetabled			1 hour			2 hours			3+ hours	
	Comm	Applic of No	IT	Comm	Applic of No	IT	Comm	Applic of No	IT	No	IT
Art & Design	87.7	90.2	67.5	8.6	9.2	17.8	3.7	-	6.1	0.6	6.7
Business	70.7	72.7	54.6	23.6	20.7	27.3	5.7	5.2	13.2	1.4	4.9
Health & Social Care	90.3	48.4	37.1	4.8	40.3	25.0	4.8	11.3	25.8	-	12.1
Leisure & Tourism	56.4	52.8	42.7	34.9	35.8	37.2	8.7	11.0	13.3	0.4	6.9
Hospitality & Catering	91.7	54.2	29.2	8.3	43.8	37.5	-	-	33.3	2.1	-
Science	48.3	36.7	28.3	41.7	10.0	16.7	10.0	38.3	55.0	15.0	-

Table III.iii. Separately timetabled core skills provision per week reported by 2nd year Advanced students by GNVQ

All GNVQs were included in running tests of statistical significance, but only those where respondent numbers are ≥20 are included above.

Significance levels: for relationship between GNVQ and receiving any separate IT or Number or Communication: p <.0001

for relationship between GNVQ and amount of separate IT or Number or Communication: p <.05

Appendix IV The Structure of GNVQs

THE ADVANCED GNVQ

Eight mandatory vocational units

Four optional vocational units

Three mandatory core skill units at level 3

Usually a two year programme.

THE INTERMEDIATE GNVQ

Four mandatory vocational units

Two optional vocational units

Three mandatory core skill units at level 2

Usually a one year programme.

THE FOUNDATION GNVQ

Three mandatory vocational units

Three optional vocational units

Three mandatory core skill units at level 1

Usually a one year programme.

Appendix V GCSE retakes by Advanced students

Because many 'deferred entry' students had already retaken GCSEs, it is easier to report on 'direct' and 'deferred' entry students separately. In the first year of their Advanced course, 17% of "direct entry" respondents reported that they planned to re-take Maths GCSE. We did not ask them to specify whether it would be that year or later; but the usual practice in schools and colleges is for re-sits to be after one year (in this case, summer of 1995).

As the table below shows, retake plans were associated with previous results. Those with very poor GCSEs were less likely to attempt Maths again.

	<3 GCSEs A–D	3 GCSEs A–D	4 GCSEs A–D	5+ GCSEs A–D	All
% retaking Maths	5.5	23.1	30.3	16.6	17.0

Table V.i Direct entry students' retake intentions (Year 1)

Among deferred entry students, fifteen percent reported that they were resitting Maths. These are lower proportions than obtained in the 'direct entry' group, the reason being that (as would be expected in view of the generally rather lower GCSE profile of this group) relatively large numbers of students had already retaken GCSE Maths: 28.1% of those reporting deferred entry had done so.

On the second questionnaire, completed in spring 1996, 11.1% of those responding ("direct entry" and "deferred entry" students combined) gave a grade for a Maths re-take from the previous summer. Some of those who did not give a grade had originally stated they were going to re-take; but we cannot tell whether they did retake, but failed to provide their grade, or whether they did not in fact retake at all.

Overall, 13.4% of second year respondents planned to retake Maths that year. This includes a third of those who re-took Maths GCSE at the end of the first year of their Advanced programme. These 'repeat' students comprised 3.4% of second year students. The further 10% of the second year respondents who planned a retake had not retaken in their first year. Of the 36 who had re-taken in 1995 and were planning to do so again, 6 were students who had already re-taken maths during their period as Intermediate GNVQ students and for whom it was a third attempt. Two students among those who were re-taking in 1996, but had not done so in 1995 had also done so before, when they were Intermediate students. To summarise: 13% were retaking in 1996, just under 10% for the first time, 2.8% for the second, and 0.6% for the third.

If we compare the proportions of respondents from different GNVQs who retook Maths GCSE in their first year, the range is from 18% in Science to 7%

among Leisure and Tourism students. For the sample as a whole, there is no statistically significant relationship between GNVQ subject and the likelihood of re-taking; but we surmise that the higher rate among Science students does indeed reflect the requirements of their future career and study choices.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	U
"Deferred Entry" maths resits (summer 1994)	0.7%	5.7%	30.5%	36.5%	19.4%	5.0%	2.2%
Direct entry maths resits (summer 1995)	–	2.7%	40.9%	34.5%	16.5%	2.7%	2.7%
Direct entry maths resits (summer 1996)	–	2.9%	48.5%	33.8%	8.8%	2.9%	2.9%

Table V.ii. Maths GCSE resits: reported grades on first attempted resit

Table V.ii summarises resit results, and compares the (1994) grades obtained by the academically weaker 'deferred entry' students with those reported by 'direct entry' students and with those obtained in summer 1996 at the end of the Advanced course. Among the summer 1995 group 44% obtained a C or above — not a majority but not a forlorn hope either. A majority of the second year group (51.4%) did the same. (The much smaller group from the first cohort for whom retake results are available registered a 55% 'success' rate.) Those with stronger academic credentials tended to do better on resits within as well as between these groups. For example, students also taking an A Level — who have higher average GCSE points — also get significantly better resit grades.

Among the second year respondents combining an A Level with a GNVQ, 16% had either retaken Maths in the first year of their programme, or were planning to do so in the second.

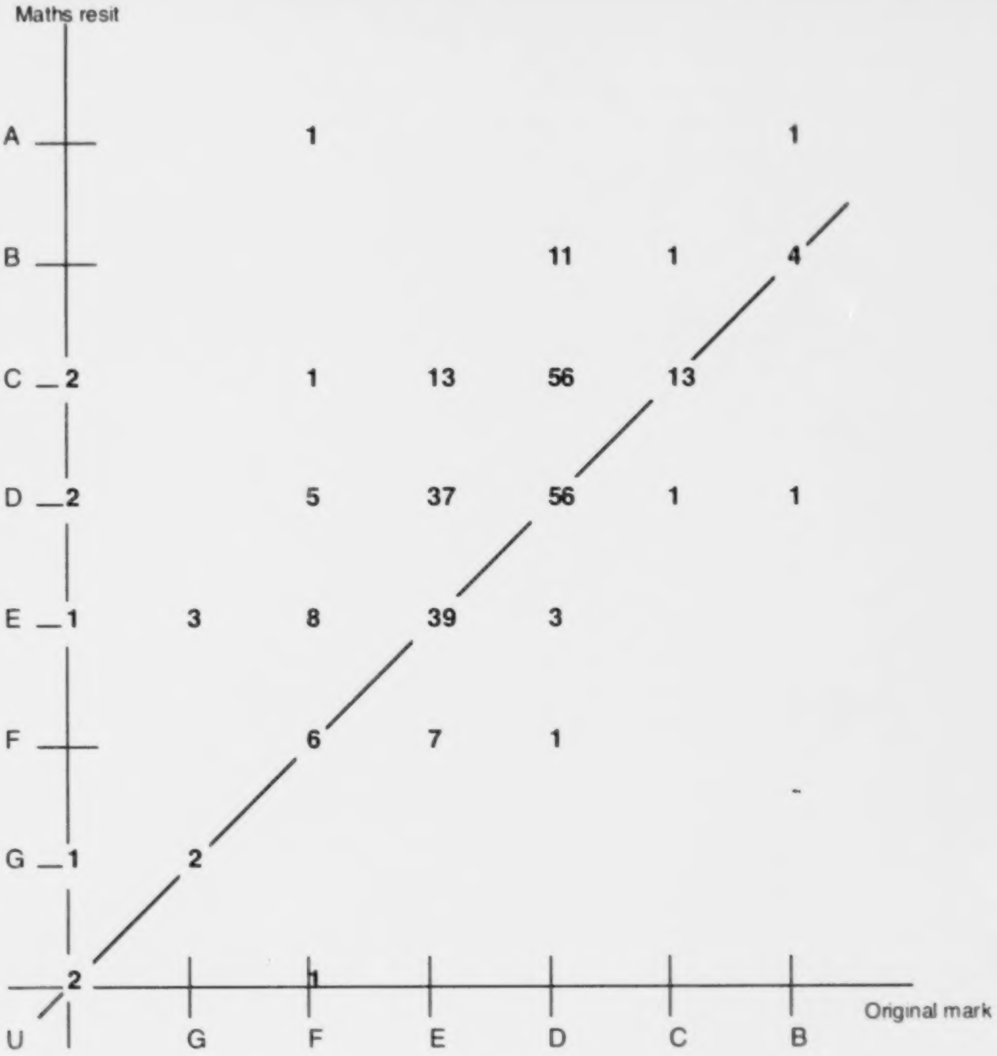
The conventional wisdom is that GCSE retakes are a waste of time. It may well be true that one-year programmes devoted entirely to retakes left some or most students with little to show for it; although we know of no hard data on the subject, and these programmes are in any case vanishing. In the case of Maths resits, our data show a more complex picture. They certainly do not suggest that students are irrational in pursuing a GCSE C grade via resits: many will achieve it. However those with very low grades are most unlikely to, and not many have the stamina for a third or fourth attempt at the same qualification.

We can illustrate this (Figure A.5i) with the resit grade against original grade for Maths of 'deferred entry' students. These are students who were on the first year of an Advanced GNVQ in 1994-5, and who had taken their resit before commencing the Advanced GNVQ. They are much weaker academically than direct entry students; and can be compared with the parallel group the year before for whom results appear in Figures 23 and 25 of *GNVQs 1994-5: A National Survey Report* (not Figures 24 and 26). The overall picture is broadly similar.

In figure V.i, numbers to the *left* of the diagonal all represent improvers. The figure shows that, of the 280 respondents who had retaken Maths, 51% had improved their grade, and 44% remained the same. Forty-five percent of respondents in this group had originally achieved a D in GCSE Maths, and 34% had achieved an E. 37% of respondents ended up with a C or better on their retake.

Respondents appeared to have performed slightly better in English Language retakes (Figure V.ii). Of the 230 cases in this group, 53% registered an improvement on their retake. Forty-one percent remained the same. Sixty-eight percent of this group consisted of students who had originally obtained a D in GCSE English Language, and 17% had originally obtained an E. Seventy percent of those with an E had registered an improvement, however. Overall, 57% of respondents achieved a C or better on their retake.

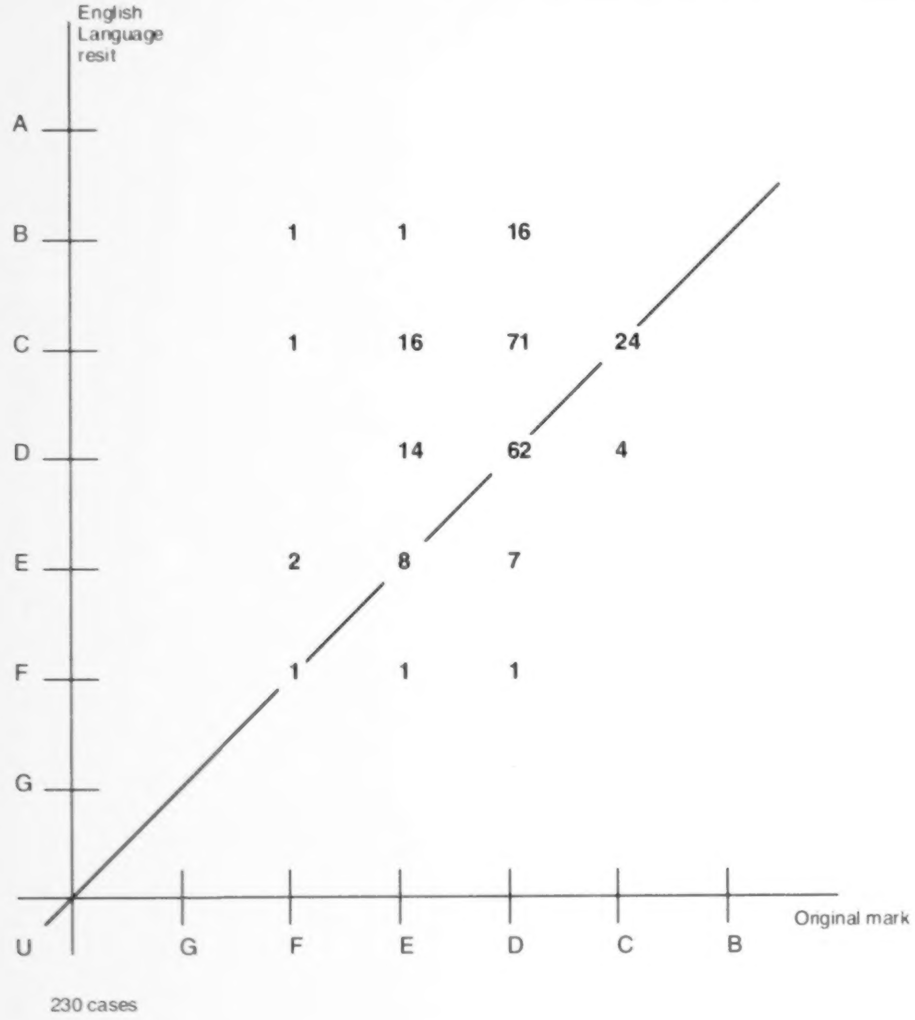
There was a smaller number of respondents retaking English Literature. Of the 102 who were, 50% registered an improvement, and 44% registered no change. Sixty percent of the group originally had a D in GCSE English Literature, and 20% originally had an E. Overall, 59% of respondents achieved a C or better on their retake.



280 cases

Cases to the left of the bisecting line: *improved*
Cases to the right of the bisecting line: *deteriorated*
Cases on the bisecting line: *same*

Figure V.i. Maths resit results: Advanced GNVQ candidates



Cases to the left of the bisecting line: improved
Cases to the right of the bisecting line: deteriorated
Cases on the bisecting line: same

Figure V.i. English resit results: Advanced GNVQ candidates

English re-sits are significantly less common among Advanced GNVQ respondents. This reflects the pattern of results described in detail in earlier reports: namely that relatively few 16 year olds with a C in Maths enter GNVQ programmes, but that many with a C in English do. (Nationally, a consistently higher proportion of the GCSE cohorts obtains C or above in English than in Maths.)

In the first year of their Advanced course, 8.5% stated that they planned to retake English. In addition, a good number of students reported having done so already: 10% of the whole group, or 23% of 'deferred entry' respondents had already retaken English Language; and 4.5% of the total, or 10% of the deferred entry group had retaken English Literature.

Of the 230 cases in this group, 53% registered an improvement on their retake. Forty-one percent remained the same. Sixty-eight percent of this group consisted of students who had originally obtained a D in GCSE English Language, and 17% had originally obtained an E. Seventy percent of those with an E had registered an improvement, however. Overall, 57% of respondents achieved a C or better on their retake.

A smaller number of 'deferred entry' respondents reported having retaken English Literature. Of the 102 who did so, 50% registered an improvement, and 44% registered no change. Sixty percent of the group originally had a D in GCSE English Literature, and 20% originally had an E. Overall, 59% of respondents achieved a C or better on their retake.

Of respondents in the second year 7% reported that they had indeed taken English GCSE the previous summer. 52% of these summer resits had resulted in a grade of C or above. The proportion resitting was significantly lower for those doing an A Level with their GNVQ, where only 4 students (less than 3%) retook their English GCSE during the first year.[1] 65 students, or 6.5% of the overall group, were planning to retake English during their second year of Advanced GNVQ studies, of whom 18 (28%) were students who had already taken it once in their first year and still not achieved a C. The other 72% planning a 1996 retake had not taken it during their first year Advanced studies. There was no significant relationship between the likelihood of retaking and GNVQ area.

Very few students took *both* English *and* Maths GCSEs in their first year of study; only just over 1% with a further 3% planning to do so at the end of their second year. Single retakes were far more frequent. Thus, 10% of those who retook Maths in their first year were planning an English retake in their second; and 27% of those who retook English in year 1 planned a Maths retake in year 2.

As with Maths, English resit plans were closely associated with previous grades. Table V.iii summarises the relationship.

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[1] Three of these got a C, one a D. No A Level students were planning a second year retake.

	% with a given grade in GCSE English Language who are resitting English	% with a given grade in GCSE English Lit who are resitting English	% with a given grade in GCSE Maths who are resitting Maths
U	–	–	–
G	–	–	25.0
F	60.0	50.0	36.1
E	33.3	25.9	31.4
D	36.8	18.0	42.7
C	0.2	4.7	0.5
B	–	1.1	0.7

Table V.iii. English and Maths GCSE retakes: take-up by GCSE results for 'direct entry' Advanced students

Note that 'English retakes' were not divided into English Language and English Literature on the questionnaire, so it possible that some people with, for example, a B in Literature might be retaking Language (though this is probably not a very likely occurrence)

Appendix VI The phasing in of GNVQs

INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED

	1992/3	1993/4	1994/5	1995/6	1996/7
Health & Social Care	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Leisure & Tourism	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Business	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Art & Design	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Manufacturing	Pilot	Available	Available	Available	Available
Science		Pilot	Available	Available	Available
Construction & the Built Environment		Pilot	Available	Available	Available
Hospitality & Catering		Pilot	Available	Available	Available
Engineering			Pilot	Available	Available
Information Technology			Pilot	Available	Available
Media: Communications Available & Production				Pilot	Available
Distribution			Pilot	Pilot	Available
Management Studies (advanced only)			Pilot	Pilot	Available
Landbased & Environmental Industries					Pilot
Performing Arts					Pilot

Appendix VII Student Survey: Sampling

SITE VISIT DATA

A subsample of 42 centres was selected from the main sample for site visits. Fifteen of these centres (seven general FE colleges, two comprehensive schools, a grant maintained grammar school, a county high school, a secondary school, two sixth form colleges and a tertiary college) were visited before the end of the 1993-4 academic year. The complete group consists of 16 FE colleges, 6 VIth form colleges and 20 schools, chosen to reflect as representative a spread of size, location and awarding body distribution as possible.

STUDENT DATA

A questionnaire was sent to students at 82 centres—all of the centres in the site visit sample, plus another 40. The extra 40 consisted of 30 centres chosen from the main sample, together with 10 selected at random from the list of original GNVQ pilot centres. Around 3000 student questionnaires were sent out. (Numbers sent to each centre were based on enrolment information provided by centres at the beginning of the year; but actual enrolments in June often turned out to be considerably lower.) 1103 valid responses were obtained from 53 centres (22 FE colleges, 7 VIth form colleges and 24 schools). It should be emphasised that although the majority of centres offering GNVQs are schools, FE colleges provide the bulk of student enrolment.

The design used for this survey (determined partly by these historical reasons) was a form of multistage clustering. From the random sample of 225 centres chosen at the beginning of 1993 (a sample which now overrepresents FE colleges, to an extent which only became clear *after* the student survey went out*) about 50 centres offering Science were chosen (an additional aim for this part of the project being to collect data on the GNVQs being generally offered for the first time in 1994-5, and on Science in particular). At each of these centres a random sample of Intermediate and first year Advanced GNVQ students was taken (with variable sampling fraction ≥0.5, depending on the size of the institution).

This resulted in 3574 valid questionnaire returns (a response rate of more than a third — rather better than was obtained in 1993-4). However, only about 350 of these responses were from school (as opposed to FE college or SFC) students. Whereas in a simple random scheme this would be sufficient for calculating, for example proportions ±5% with 95% confidence, the increased design effect for this sampling method will result in an increase in standard errors (and hence decrease in levels of accuracy).

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* This overrepresentation arises from the fact that whereas GNVQs were not offered by a very large number of schools when they were first developed, the vast majority of new centres which have started offering GNVQs since 1993 have been schools

We discuss below the use of weights to rectify the imbalance in the representation of population strata for calculating overall summary statistics. We can be fairly confident about results calculated separately for FE college or SFC GNVQ students. It should be borne in mind, however, that results that apply specifically to school students may not be as accurate.

All of the first set of responses were collected from students in and through their colleges and schools. Some of the first set of follow-up responses (spring 1996) were also collected this way; others by direct mailing (to those students who had provided their addresses for this purpose.) The final follow-up (winter 1996-7) was entirely by mail. All students responding to the first questionnaire and for whom we had addresses were contacted on this final occasion.

Longitudinal surveys always encounter problems in maintaining response rates, and this one has been no exception. In each case, we sent an original follow-up questionnaire and then a second reminder. The reminders for the final follow-up were sent over the 1996-7 Christmas and New Year holiday (to catch students during university vacations).

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